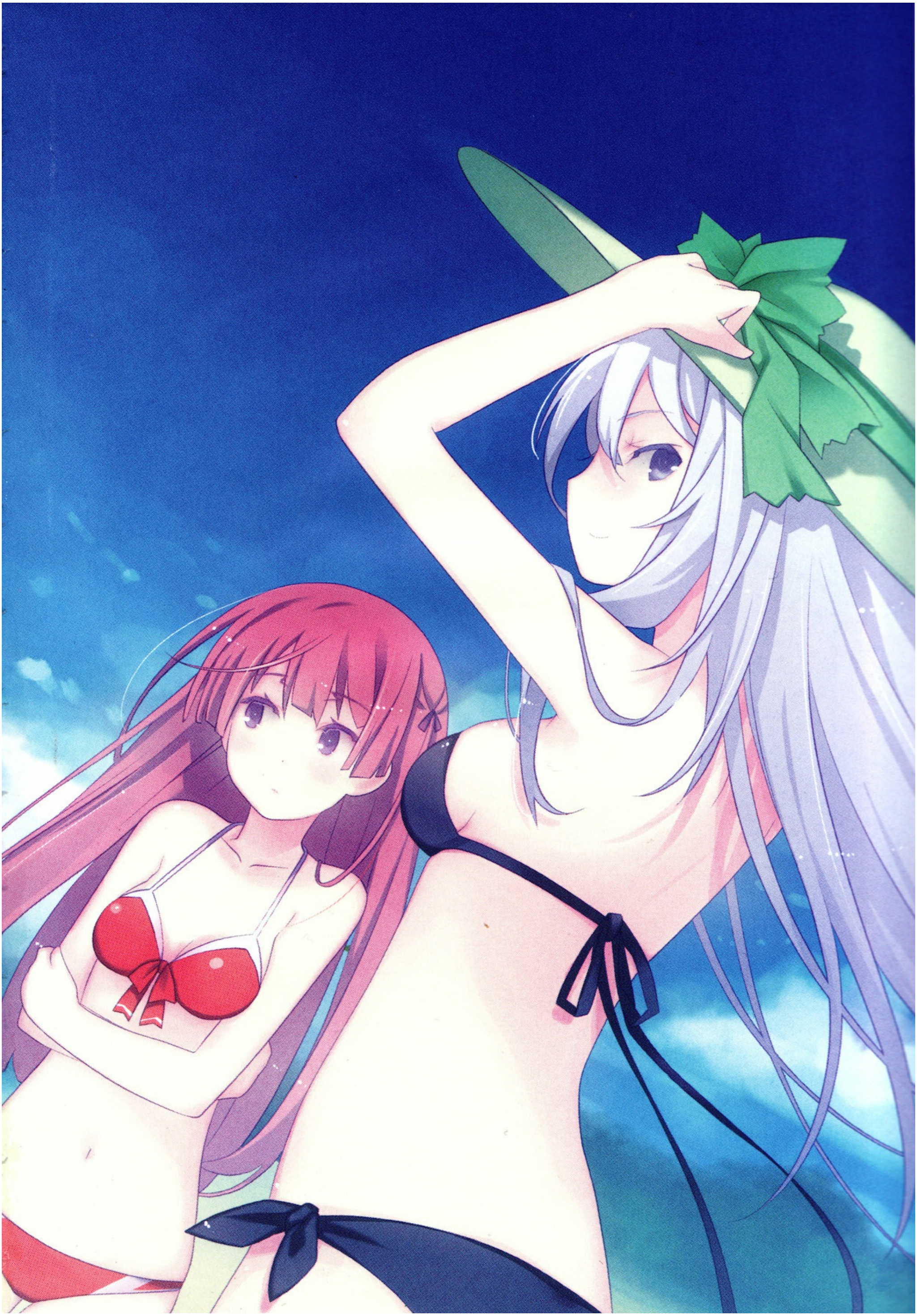
裕時悠示　イラスト　るろお

俺の彼女と幼なじみが修羅場すぎる

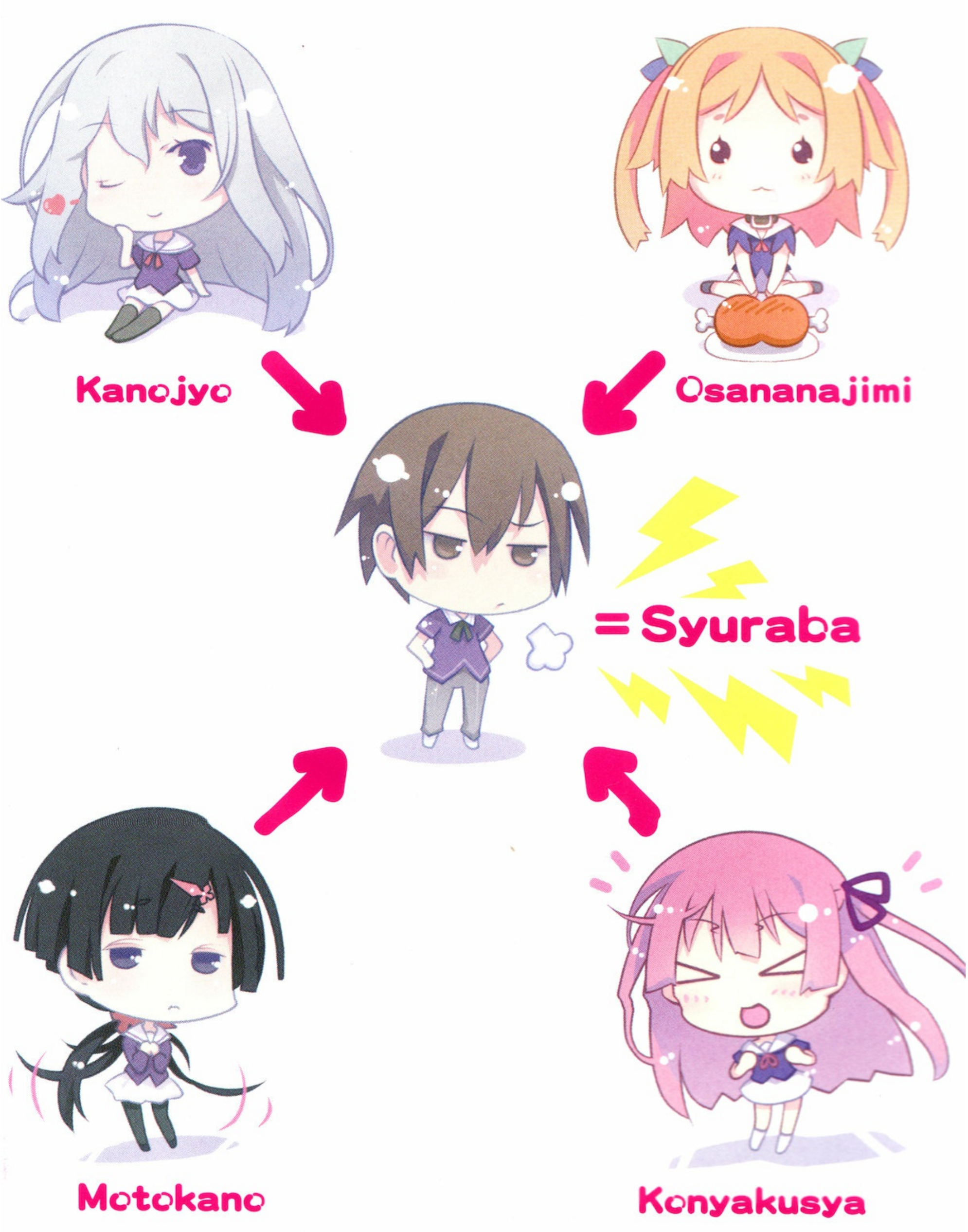
4

GA文庫

俺の彼女と幼なじみが修羅場すぎる



Ore no kanojyo to osananajimi ga syuraba sugiru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Masuzu Natsukawa

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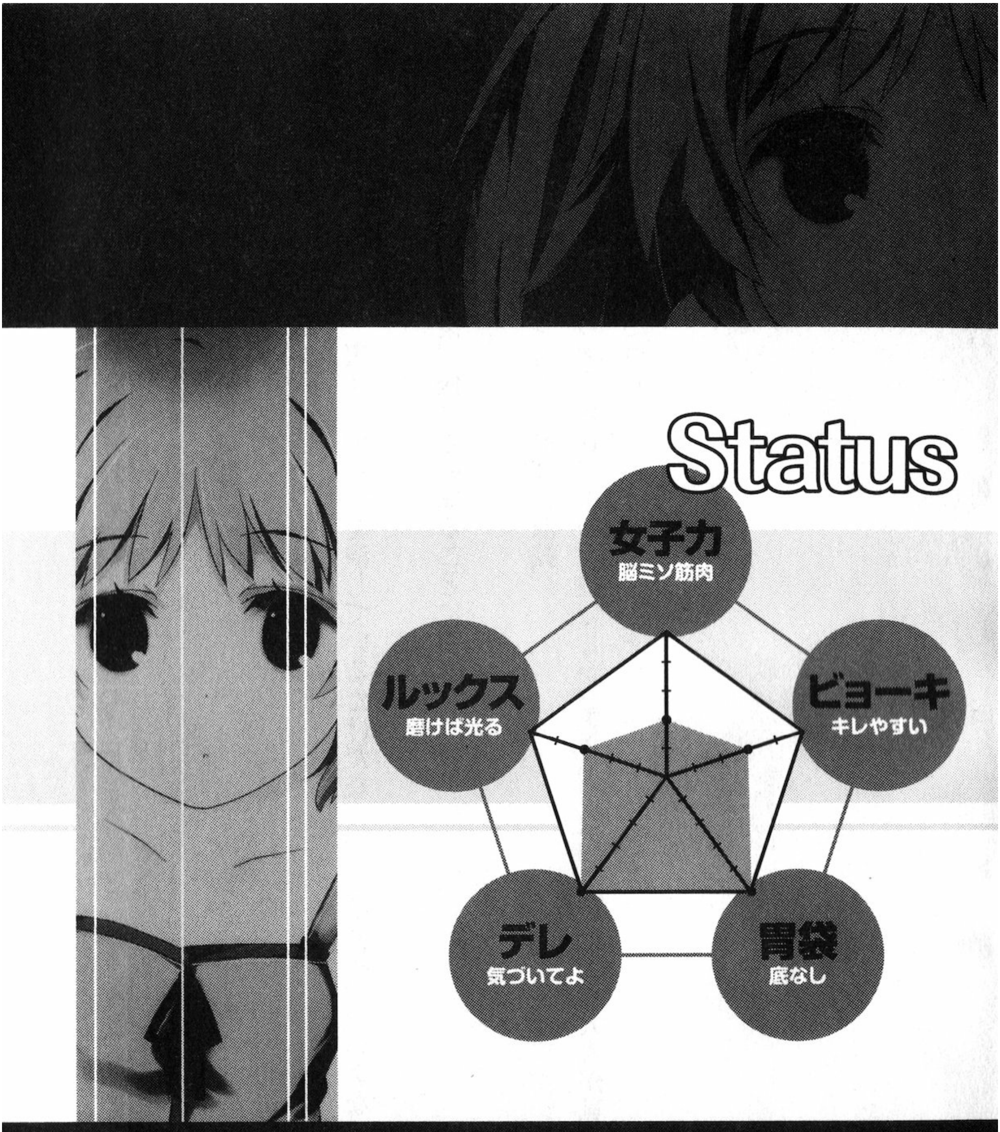
Ai Fuyuumi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磨けば光る

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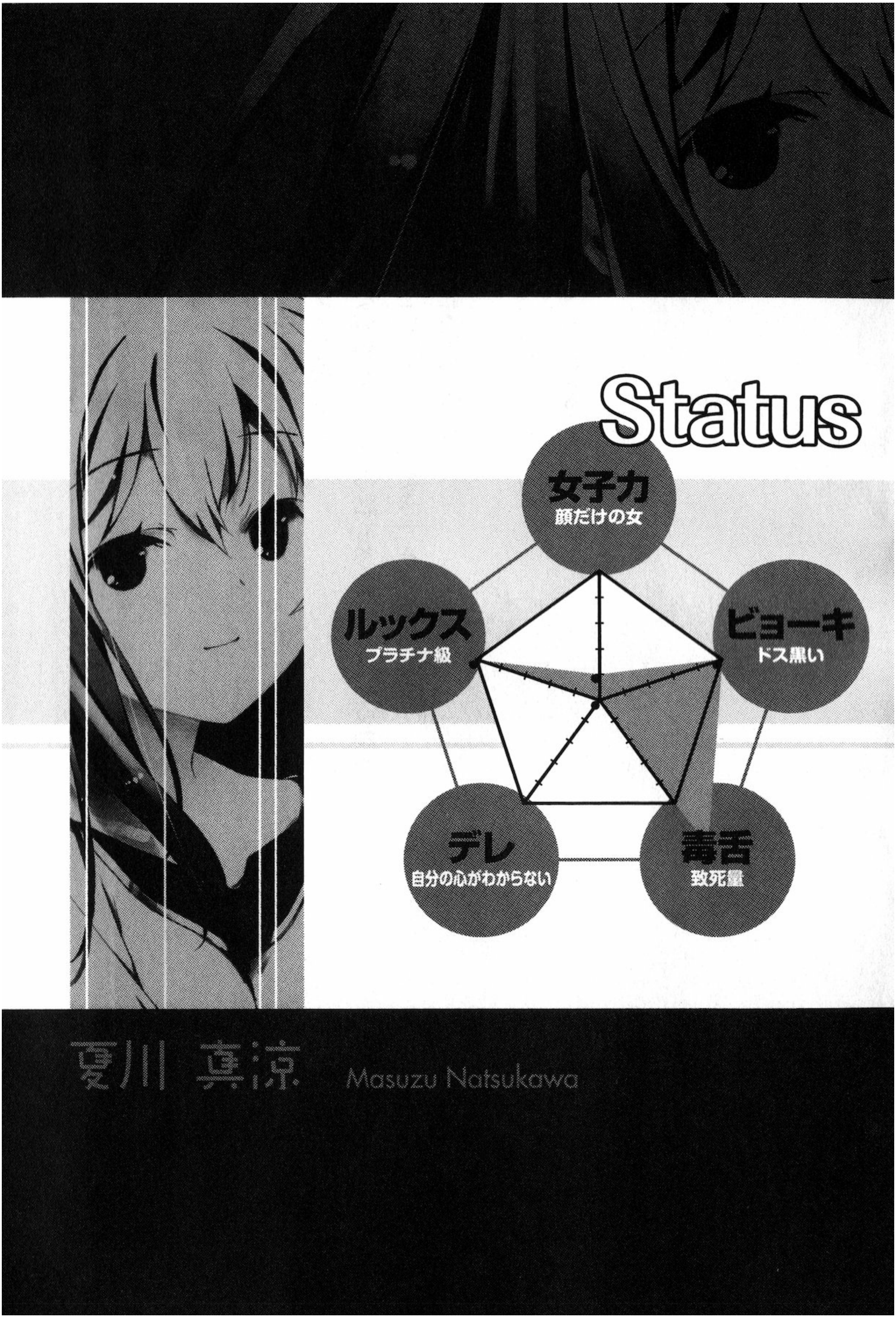
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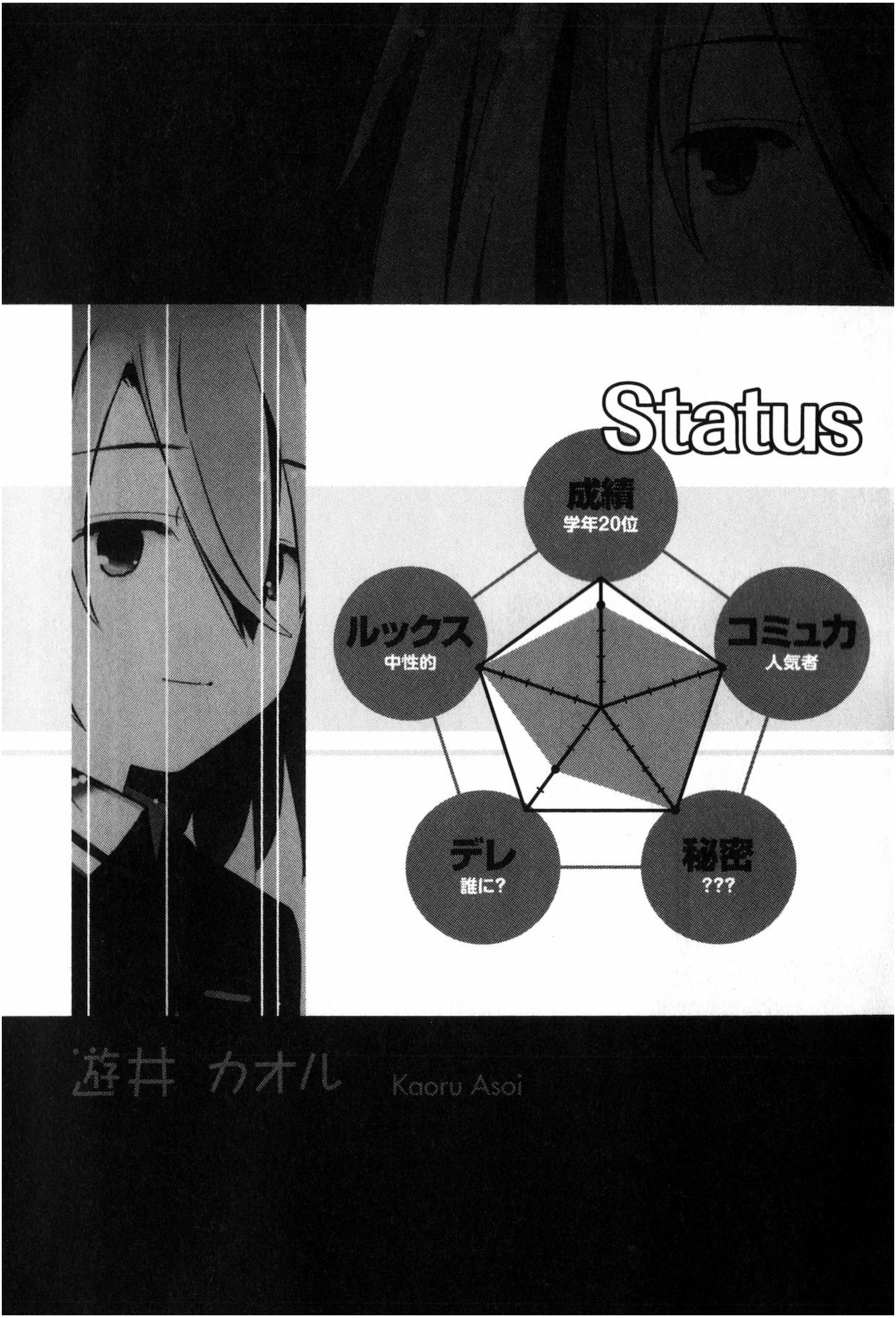
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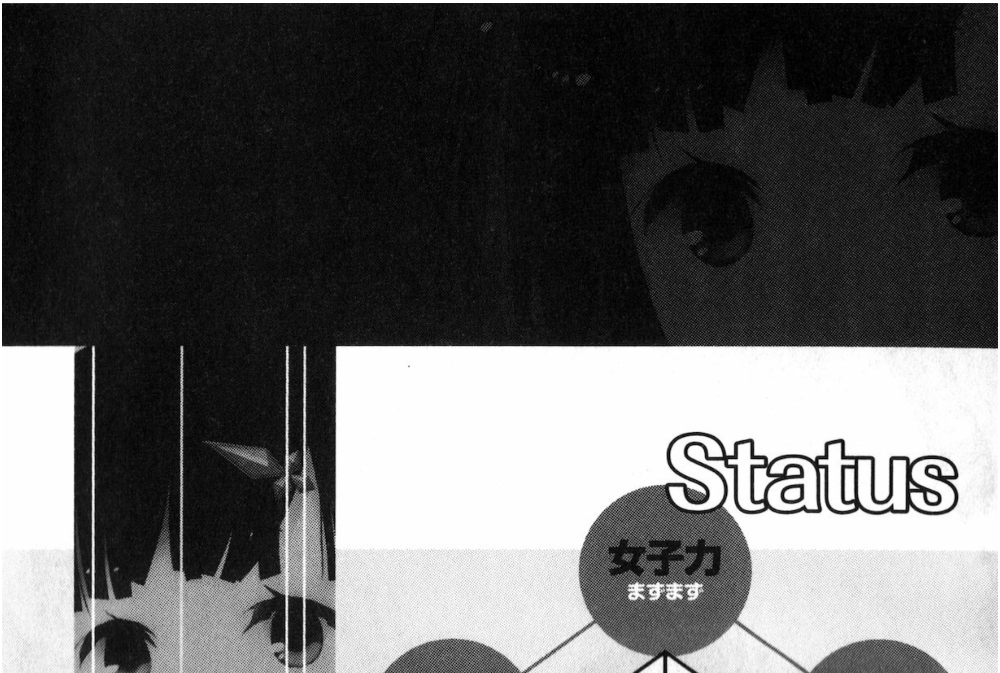
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デレ
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ルックス
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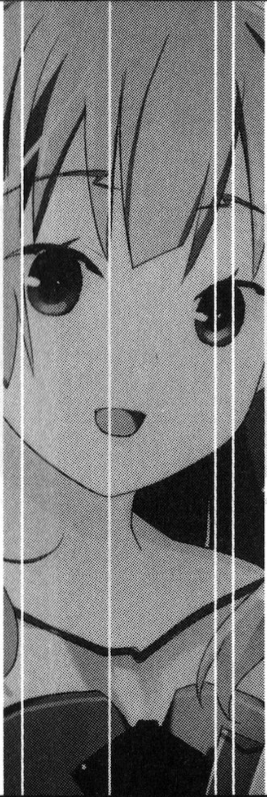
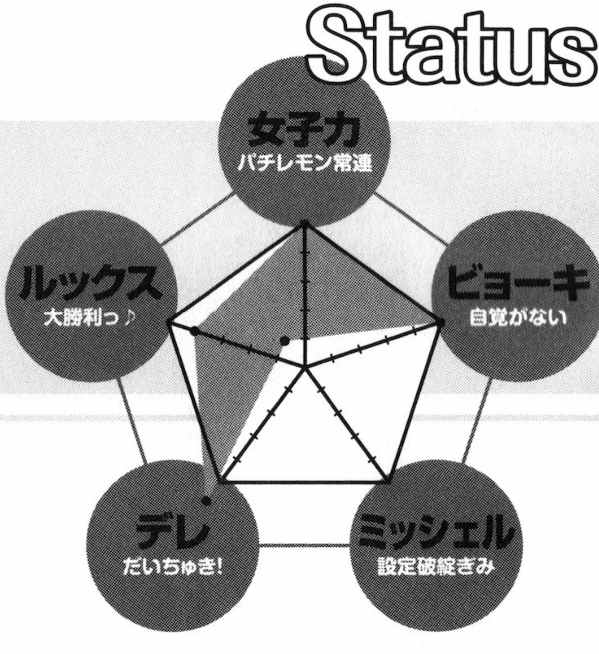
秋篠 姫香　Himeka Akishino

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ビョーキ
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ミッシェル
設定破綻ぎみ
デレ
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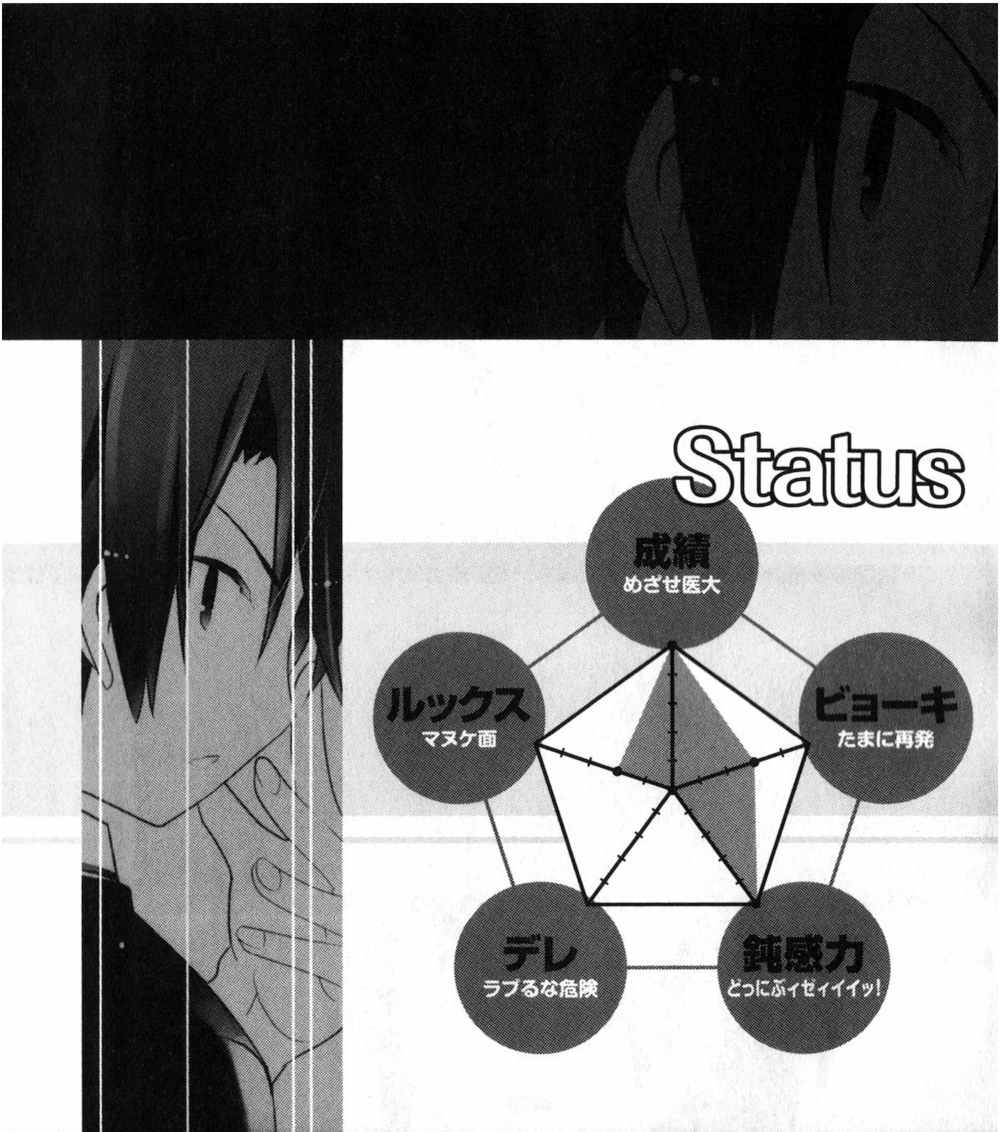
ルックス
大勝利っ♪

冬海 愛衣

Ai Fuyuumi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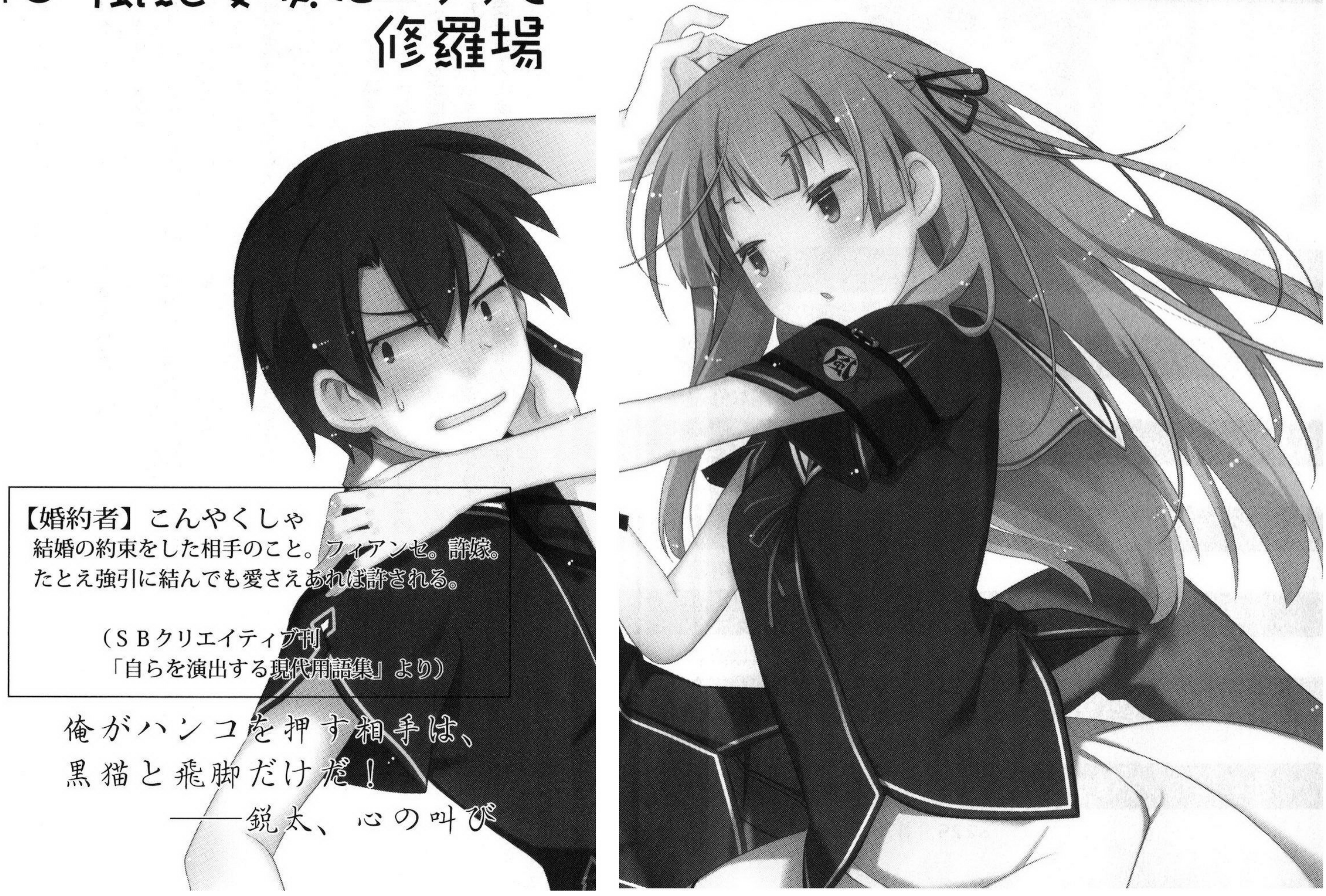
どっにふぃゼィイイッ!
デレ
ラブるな危険
ルックス
マヌケ面

季堂　鋭太　Eita Kidou

#0: Announcement of the Disciplinary Committee is Mayhem

#0 風紀委員にコクッて修羅場



【婚約者】 こんやくしゃ
結婚の約束をした相手のこと。フィアンセ。許嫁。
たとえ強引に結んでも愛さえあれば許される。

（ＳＢクリエイティブ刊
「自らを演出する現代用語集」より）

俺がハンコを押す相手は、
黒猫と飛脚だけだ！
——鋭太、心の叫び

A commanding storm blew through the area.

"Come on, let's start the club activities!"

Fuyuumi Ai stood in front of the whiteboard, as she pointed at us.

She was surrounded by an air of importance.

Today was August 2nd, which was also the dark day that ruptured our summer vacation paradise— 'The *First* Day of School. After classes were over, our 'Jien-Otsu' gathered in the club room for the first time in a long while, but--

"Excuse me... Fuyuumi?"

Chiwa whispered quietly, her right cheek twitching slightly.

"What, Harusaki Chiwa?"

"Why are you somehow acting as if you were a big shot?!"

Fuyuumi wondered as she tilted her head and said:

"The person who worked to save the club from *almost* being shut-down was *me*, right? "

"The person who *pushed* our club to the brink of being shut-down was also *you*!"

When our club was considered a 'menace to school discipline', the person who led the movement that wanted to shut down our Jien-Otsu was the 'demon disciplinary committee member' Fuyuumi Ai herself. But after a lot of chaos, Fuyuumi joined the 'Jien-Otsu' while taking the role of a 'coach'. She was still serving as disciplinary committee member, and she still wore that trademark discipline committee armband.

"Since I have joined this club, I hereby prohibit all strange club activities. Please gear yourselves for a transition to more sensible, pure, and beautiful high school club activities, *that's* how it is."

"Uuuuuh... She's only a new member."

"Talking back against the coach is also prohibited, *senior* member!"

"Merely a rookie, merely a rookie—!"

"Chihuahua, can you please not make Master angry?"

Hime, who stood next to her, stroked Chiwa on the back as Chiwa gnashed her teeth.

"Master is a love expert, and she'll certainly guide us to becoming 'popular'.

Hime's gazed at Fuyuumi with shining eyes full of admiration. To go as far as to call her Master, she must have wholeheartedly worshipped Fuyuumi.

Fuyuumi beamed with joy, nodded satisfied and said:

"It seems you're quite promising, Akishino-san."

"You can call me Hime."

"Hime-chan, I will guide you to become a pure and proper maiden."

"I'm so glad, Master."

Hime let Fuyuumi rub her head, and she shrugged like she was being tickled. Was this... the birth of a master-student relationship between a beautiful disciplinary committee member and a beautiful Chuunibyou... That's what it looked like.

"As the president, I also very warmly welcome this increase in club members."

Masuzu sat on the opposite side of the table that Chiwa was also sitting on, sipping a cup of hot green tea as she spoke.

"With regards to the goal of becoming popular, I think Fuyuumi-san will make an excellent coach. After all, Fuyuumi-san has a rich handsome *boyfriend* who attends a private university in Tokyo."

Fuyuumi's expression turned morose when she heard this.

"Handsome boyfriend? What do you mean?"

"Didn't you share with us a few days ago, the sweet relationship that you have with your boyfriend?"

"...Ah, right! You mean Mittland."

"*Michel*, wasn't it?"

"Y-Yes, Michel!"

Somehow, I could totally see Fuyuumi's cheek twitch.

The college boyfriend 'Michel' this girl talked about was actually a total lie. He was an imaginary boyfriend.

At that time, when Fuyuumi and Chiwa were desperately quarreling, she was forced to blurt this lie out due to the circumstances. But since then, she's been continuously stretching the story.

"R-Right! After all my 'Love Experiences' are completely different than yours. Whether it's cuteness or feminine power, I have the upper hand!"

"Well, well, so wonderful ♪ Please show your juniors, Harusaki-san and Akishino-san that skills of yours."

Masuzu smiled sweetly-- But since I sat next to her, I could see that the surface of her arms uncovered by her short sleeves were full of goose bumps.

After all, Masuzu was 'Anti-Love', just like me.

So what about popularity or feminine power? It looked like her heart was rather resistant to this kind of frivolous vocabulary, so much that she could even hold back from showing her true feelings in this type of situation. She really was something.

"Well, you can teach us... the right way to confess to the people we like."

Thus, Chiwa stole a glance at my face. *Don't look at me.*

"I also want to see. I want to study Master's ways."

Hime also gazed steadily at me. *Really, stop looking at me!*

Fuyuumi shook her head strongly and said:

"The idea of confessing to the boy yourself is wrong in the first place. As young maidens, we need to have the boy confess to us!"

The Spring, Summer, and Autumn trio all exclaimed, 'Oh'!

"So to speak, Michel was the one who confessed to Fuyuumi, right?"

"To be confessed by a college student, Master is cool."

"I hope you can tell us how to behave and be mentally prepared during a confession."

Masuzu was probably the number one most-confessed-to person in the school, but she even said this. It clearly made Fuyuumi very anxious.

"Even if you say it l-like that, you only have to be creative. Y-You need to act befitting according to the situation."

"I get it."

Thus, Masuzu turned towards me and said:

"Eita-kun, could you please confess to Fuyuumi-san here and now?"

"Ha?"

"Because I want to give Fuyuumi-san the *opportunity* to demonstrate the proper behavior of a maiden when being confessed to".

Damn it, Masuzu. Again you go and say something troublesome.

Fuyuumi hugged her arms close:

"Eeeh-- Kidou-kun will...? Please don't joke, I have the right to select the person who confesses to me, right?"

"But why are you smiling as if you're delighted?"

"H-How could that be?! You must be seeing things!"

However, unfortunately, the disciplinary member's mouth was already smiling softly!

Since I couldn't disobey a order from the president, I began to act out my 'confession scene'.

"W-Well, I'll start then."

"Fine, just come!"

Fuyuumi placed her hands on her hips, and posed with a 'tsun' atmosphere.

[...]

"What is it, Kidou-kun? If you stay silent, then it won't be a confession."

"Yeah, I know."

Because I never confessed to anyone before...

Whatever, I'll just do it casually.

"Fuyuumi Ai-san, in truth I really like you!"

"Hmph, I *know*."

"I love you— Go out with me—"

"Sorry, but I've never regarded you as a member of the opposite sex. Can we just be friends?"

"I understand— I'll give up——"

"You can't give up now!"

"Eh?!"

Fuyuumi pointed at me, who was in a daze, and said:

"If you give up now, your chance for love will end. Your feelings for me, your love, you need to make them burst!"

...Such un-unreasonable demands...

"But, if you look at the circumstances, wasn't I already rejected?"

"Isn't that obvious? I'm not the kind of girl that can be conquered so easily."

"Then it's fine, I might as well give up."

"How can you confess without any enthusiasm?! You need to attack with even more ferocity, and then I'll refuse you even more ferociously. A confession is just like that."

Yuck, sounds too bothersome—

I turned around to see if the other three would help me, but—

"Ei-kun really doesn't have guts! After saying that, you are backing away?"

"This person who is one of the Warriors of the Holy Dragon Race, I am very ashamed."

"Such a worthless man, very soon we'll become strangers."

I was being isolated, and I couldn't find even half a companion. It was too much, *too much*.

Just as I was at the end of my rope, Masuzu started to rummage through her bag.

"In this kind of situation, it's better to let this take the stage."

In a very familiar development, Masuzu took out my 'Eighth Grade Notebook'.

"That's a really old notebook. What is it?"

"This was the diary my 'first love' left for me. The secrets of how to attract the opposite sex and how to be an attractive person are recorded inside."

"You mean it's a notebook on how to be popular? Sounds kind of interesting."

It seemed like even Fuyuumi's interest was perked, and she looked as if she wanted to try it out.

Masuzu's shoulder leaned close on mine as she opened the notebook and said:

"Please give this 'Certainly dangerous ☆ 100% Concentrated ☆ Collection of Pick-up Lines' a try♪."

"Ha? Don't screw around. You give it a try, you shitty poisonous tongue woman."

"Fuyuumi-san? —Let me correct myself, this notebook is actually Eita-kun's—"

"Pliase let me give it my most earnest effoooooooord! Masuzu-wa—n!"

Well, fine. I'll just do it. If it comes down to this, I'll give it my all!

As my hands firmly grabbed Fuyuumi's shoulders, I was willing to do it with more *ferocity*.

"W-What's with you all of a sudden? E-Even if you become more coercive to convince me, it's useless!"

Fuyuumi's cheeks were blushing a little, and I stared into her eyes and spoke:

"'You might not really want it, but I'll have you go crazy for me.'"

"[...] [...] ...Haaa?"

Fuyuumi gave this surprised cry from the bottom of her heart.

And as I was regretting this from the bottom of my heart, I wanted to die a worthless death.

"Why are you saying such embarrassing lines? Are you stupid?"

—Quiet! I'm the one who feels the most embarrassed here!

While I was crying out in my heart, the next bullet fired.

"'What you truly want is not lines, but to be reached by the Excalibur KISS[1].'"

"Are you all right? Should we go to the hospital?"

I truly made her worry.

Even though I wanted to immediately go home, bury my face in a pillow, and kick my feet, if I stopped now it would be even more embarrassing. I could only see this to the end!

"'You should be careful. After all my KISS is called 'Reppuzan[2]'」.'"

"...Errr, Kidou-kun?"

"'Reppuzan'! 'Reppuzan', 'Reppuzan'!"

"Hey, can't you listen when other people are talking?!"

"————REPPU————————————————ZA——————————N!"

Huff, this is all I can bear!

Even though I felt like I lost something very important, I tried my best to finish this.

Would Fuyuumi scorn me from now on? But at least Masuzu should be able to understand—

Just as I was thinking this, Fuyuumi's wrinkled eyebrows suddenly glazed over into eyes looking afar.

"'Such a KISS. before it gets to touch my lips gets stopped by a varia.'"

"…Varia?"

"B-Barrier!"

"A barrier—"

Fuyuumi was a really interesting person.

I didn't think she would actually go along with my 'Eighth Grade Confession'.

But then again, she was the owner of that 'Delusional Notebook', so maybe she also had this kind of inclination.

Well, if that's the case, then I'll turn up the notch a bit.

"'Your universe has been caught in the color of me. Me-ER. Me-EST'."

Wuuuuhhhhhhhh—

I really want to die—

I didn't understand what I was saying anymore.

Why would I want to die from making a love confession?

Anyway, why did I always try to add superlatives to nouns back then? This had always been the case since I had been in eighth grade. My English teacher had asked me, 'What is the past tense of 'IS'?' And I replied, 'ISED'. It was my greatest humiliation ever.

I thought that Fuyuumi would be astonished to the extreme this time— but I didn't expect her to be stifling her mouth, looking down.

Did this mean she was happy? Because of this kind of confession?

"Iven if you shtart shaying cool things now, it won't do any good!"

[...]

Is this how I act cool? Me-ER?

I can't understand how this was any different from the first two attempts I did. Even though I wrote it myself, I still can't understand.

So it's good like this? I'll keep going, then!

I leaned close to the ears of my prey:

"'When will you realize that my charm is a social phenomenon?'"

"Ahh..."

Fuyuumi lowered her head and shook her long hair swaying like waves.

Her eyes began to tear up, she turned her gaze towards me and said:

"I-If you just do as you please, I'll get angry! Don't make a fool out of a disciplinary committee member!"

"'Something even purer than 'Pom Juice[3]', the 120% of your fruit juice is what I'll extract from you.'"

"Fwuahh…"

Fuyuumi's beautiful hair once again began to sway like waves. The movement was greater than before.

Fuyuumi dumbly faced the three people who had watched this entire development.

"L-L-Look carefully evefryone. You can't possibly let yourself get captured by a stupid guy when he approaches you with lines like these, no matter what!"

I guess it's time I give the final blow to this disciplinary committee member.

"'The more you resist, the more you squeeze out the awakening of the 'Beast' that's hidden inside of me!'"

"Enough! You liar! It's a lie! Lie! It's totally a lie!"

"'Even if I'm lying, it's entirely because of your pheromones!'"

"[...] ...Ahh... [...]"

Fuyuumi's eyes suddenly sank.

She was like a small kindergarten child stumbling forward with small steps, as she grabbed my shirt.

"I-If you are willing to say that much… t-t-then lesh go out…"

Yes! I got her!

I caught her—

...Strange? What was my goal in the first place?

While I was thinking about my original reason, Fuyuumi happily hooked my arm.

"Anyway, now I'm going out with Ta-kun! Ai-chan EPIC WIN!♪"

The Japanese-style pancake in Chiwa's hands gave a 'crackle' sound, then was crushed and scattered.

"What's———————————going on——————————here?!"

Masuzu revealed a smile with something hidden behind it, tilted her head and said:

"Somehow, I *don't* understand what has just happened here."

But Hime had an expression like she was about to cry:

"Master has betrayed me? Really, really betrayed me?"

However, Fuyuumi looked as if that scene had nothing to do with her, instead she could be seen with her face red like a tomato and her lips curved in a broad, soft smile.

She still clung to my arms as she said:

"'If you like them, then you can't help it.' That's the principle of love! It doesn't matter if it's the childhood friend, or the girlfriend, or the ex-girlfriend. Not being careful just means that he'll be snatched away. Remember that well!"

"No kidding! That being said, you're too easy to deal with. You were so easily won over by Ei-kun!"

"I-I wasn't being won over! Ai-chan just pitied him, so I agreed!"

The entire time her arrogant attitude hadn't ceased at all, so it was probably something to admire about her.

In short, it looked like she was out of control, so I whispered to her:

"Oi, A-chan."

"What is it, Ta-kun? Y-You want to stamp it?"

"No. This isn't good for you, right? You have a 'Boyfriend'."

A-chan immediately took some small steps and said:

"I-If I'm with Ta-kun, then I'll leave him"

Oh that was cute. Really cute.

But if we act on impulse, mayhem will be waiting in front of me, so...

"But didn't you earlier proclaim in front of everyone that, 'immoral activities with the opposite sex are forbidden'?"

"Y-Yes, that's true."

"And as a disciplinary committee member and the coach of the young maiden's club, wouldn't you be setting a bad example? You should also think about the other disciplinary committee members who believe in you so much."

"...Ah, that's true. Rules and trust shouldn't be trampled over."

A-chan's hazy eyes finally rediscovered the light of rationality.

It appeared that she had been restored to the usual 'Fuyuumi Ai'. Her mood could turn from hot to cold and right back again so easily. It was really easy to understand her character.

After Fuyuumi hugged my arm tightly once more, seemingly reluctant to leave it, she finally released her grip.

"That's how it is. So the earlier confession act has now ended. And? It should have benefited you all."

The Chiwa who was planning to crawl across the table and pounce, stopped.

"Performance? What's going on?"

"I said it earlier, right? 'You need to have your love burst'. I was just playing along those lines."

Masuzu had a suspicious look on her eyes when she said:

"In other words, you weren't captured for real there, were you?"

"You actually have to ask that? After all I already have a handsome boyfriend. Why would I be won over by Kidou-kun?"

"Eita-kun, could you repeat that last line from now once more?"

"'Even if I'm lying, it's entirely because of your pheromones!'"

"Unyaaaaa————————! I lub Ta-kun! I really lub him————————!"

The escape route was completely destroyed.

I quickly cleared my throat with a dry cough. Fuyuumi got back to her senses.

"—Ermh, in short, it's like that."

Masuzu smiled and tilted her head.

"Like *what*?"

"This so-called love, is something that you can't control before it bursts. J-Just like I demonstrated it to you all moments ago, it's like that!"

Chiwa's eyes were filled with resentment when she said:

"So it really was an act?!"

"Of course! You have to confess as enthusiastically as that, or be confessed like that! The road to popularity is very dangerous!"

Fuyuumi finished with, 'Do you get it?', and Chiwa nodded reluctantly.

"Seeing how things went, we'll leave it at that for now— Okay, Fuyuumi?"

"'Ai' will do, really. And I'll call you Chiwa."

"Well, Ai— Why did you just call Ei-kun *'Ta-kun'*?"

Guh——

"I am also very concerned about it. Eita also called Master *'A-chan'*."

Guh— Guuhh——

"Don't you two seem very close? During one simple summer, how did you become so intimate after attending cram school together?"

Damn...

I carelessly called her name the way I used to.

Should I rely on nonsense to cover it up? No, I just did things half-heartedly, so it's a bit difficult—

"Since it's exposed, I guess it can't be helped."

Next to the distressed me, Fuyuumi was the first to open her mouth.

"Actually Kidou-kun and me are childhood friends."

Spring, Summer, and Autumn, the three of them were shocked, stunned.

Even I was stunned.

I didn't expect her to throw such a fastball.

"W-Wait a minute. I've never heard of this before."

Chiwa approached Fuyuumi rudely.

"If you're Ei-kun's childhood friend, then shouldn't you also have been my childhood friend? But I didn't meet you until we arrived at Hane High!"

"When did you *first* meet Kidou-kun?"

"In first grade, after I moved next door to Ei-kun's house, our relationship has been very good. We've been together for nine years."

"Hmph? Nine?"

Fuyuumi smiled.

It wasn't that arrogant 'disciplinary committee member' smile which we've seen before.

It was a rather conservative but fully assertive smile.

"The first time Kidou-kun and I met was *ten years* ago. We've been together ever since 'Star Class' in kindergarten."

Chiwa wasn't able to even gasp, as she stared at me with an expression like she was about to cry.

"Ei-kun, why didn't you ever say something about that until now?"

"It's not that he didn't say. He had forgotten it until we spoke to each other in summer cram school."

"I'm not asking you here! Hey, Ei-kun!"

As Chiwa shook my shoulders, I gave a big sigh… I guess I could only trust in my luck.

"As Fuyuumi said, I had forgotten. Because she moved away before we started elementary school, I forgot about it entirely until recently."

"Even earlier than me? You met her earlier than me?"

It seemed like Chiwa was very persistent about that point.

"I've met Fuyuumi ten years ago in spring. Chiwa has moved next door nine years ago in spring, so Fuyuumi was earlier than you by one year."

"That's…"

Chiwa bit her lips firmly, and sank into silence.

"...Wrong..."

Hime suddenly said.

She pulled hard on me, and hung wildly on my right arm as she whispered:

"I'm the one who met Eita first, because past-lives are even earlier than elementary school or kindergarten. So it's neither Master or Chihuahua. As the ex-girlfriend, I am the earliest."

Hime hugged me, her body trembling slightly.

Even though she always appeared very well-behaved, and unremarkable if compared to Chiwa or Masuzu, it probably had taken her a lot of courage to say that. She used to talk like a spoiled child before, apparently during this month she had grown a lot.

For me, however, this growth was equal to a much more hectic mayhem. So to be honest, I had mixed feelings.

"Eita, hold me."

"No, I won't. But I can rub your head?"

"...Today, I'll hold back..."

I rubbed Hime's head, and she immediately smiled and raised her lips. Great, it looked like she had recovered her enthusiasm.

"Wait a minute, what is this past life? What is this ex-girlfriend thing about?"

Fuyuumi tilted her head, Hime then stood straight and said:

"In our past lives, Eita and I had a romantic relationship. So hence I'm his ex-girlfriend."

"U-Uh-huh...?"

Fuyuumi looked at Hime's insistent face and seemed to give up asking about it.

"Well, in short, the human relationships of our club are rather complex and mysterious."

With her silver hair swaying, my 'girlfriend' Natsukawa Masuzu stood up.

She looked at Spring, Autumn, and Winter one by one, and stated in a calm tone:

"However, everyone, Eita-kun happens to be *my* boyfriend. I don't know anything about kindergarten, I'm not clear about elementary school events, and I don't plan to ask about what happened in your pasts lives. But now, he belongs to *me*. Please, by no means forget that fact."

The three of them looked as if they wanted to say something as they stared back at Masuzu— but in the end they remained silent. One by one they dropped their gaze.

Such an incredible impact.

This is the pride of the legitimate wife.

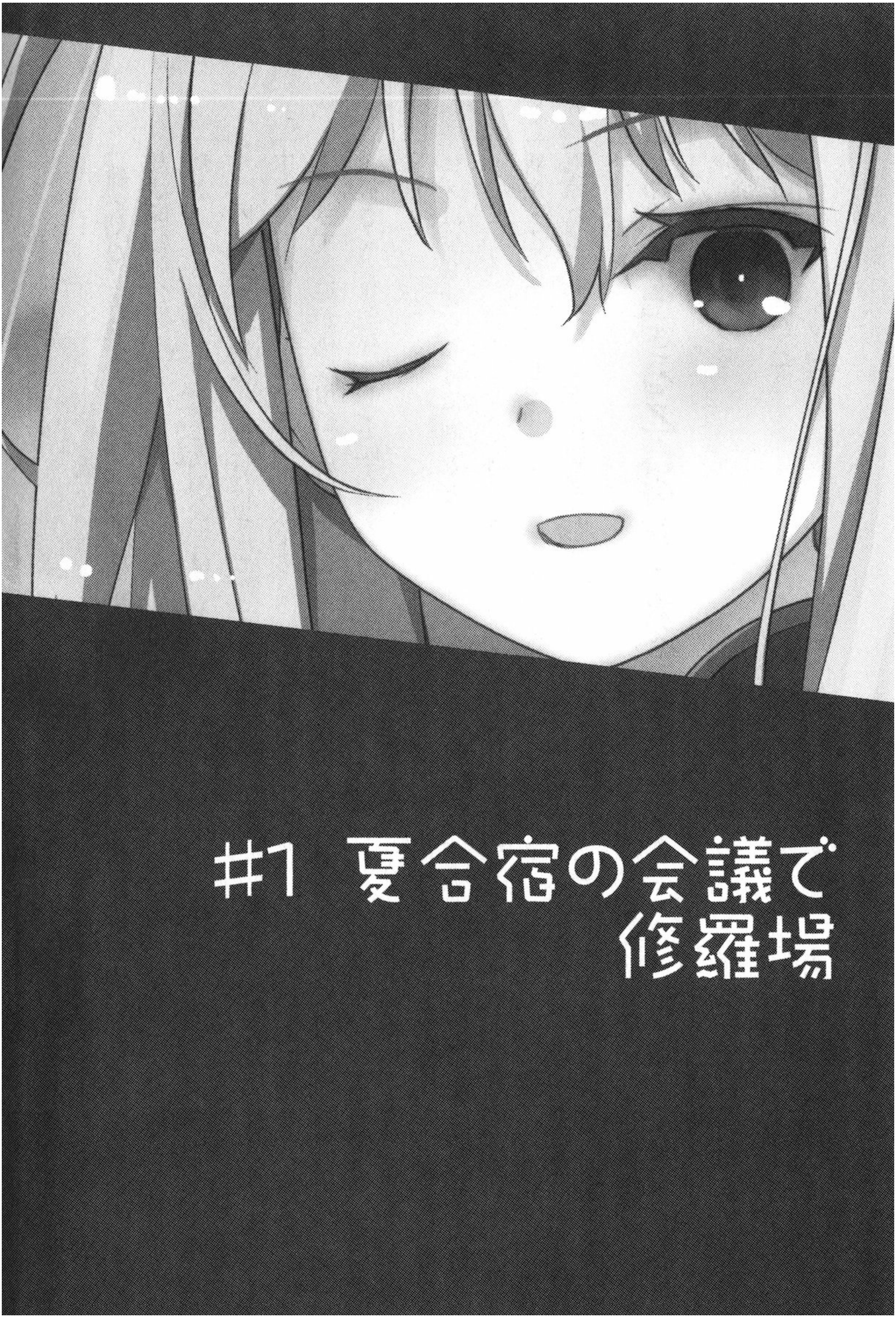
No one would ever think that Masuzu was just acting the character role of a 'girlfriend'...

However, at this point I couldn't possibly tell what would come next.

Regardless of to what degree it went, an act was still a act.

In the end this was a performance merely at the level of a children's talent show— If an experienced adult saw us, it would be noticed right away.

#1: Summer Training Meeting is Mayhem



#1 夏合宿の会議で修羅場

After the 'New Childhood Friend Found' incident came to an end, Masuzu wrapped a white cloth over her uniform.

This was the signal for the start of club activities.

"Due to Fuyuumi Ai-san joining our club, our 'Society for Bringing Out Your Maiden Self' has now finally five members, and henceforth we will be recognized as an official club."

"I already prepared the application for us."

Fuyuumi immediately placed the application on the table. That was some very thoughtful preparation. She must have been really motivated.

"Akishino-san, please sign in this space that you'll take responsibility as secretary."

"Understood."

Hime nodded with some esteem and immediately started writing. Her handwriting was very beautiful and also very confident. Perhaps she had practiced calligraphy or penmanship before. If so, it really did suit Hime's image.

"As the first move of our 'Reborn Maidens Club', I would like to revisit the plans for this summer's club activities."

Masuzu rotated the whiteboard and pointed her finger at the backside that had been hidden.

Society for Bringing Out Your Maiden Self • Regarding a Summer Training Trip

"Wow."

"Isn't it fine?"

Hime and Fuyuumi reacted enthusiastically. It seemed like they were very interested.

I originally thought Chiwa would be the same, but I never expected her to let her head hang down in silence. She was probably still caught up on the incident from earlier.

And I— I couldn't even let out a sigh.

Summer vacation was such a rare occasion, why did I have to spend it with these people? No kidding.

"Ah— You can count me out. Summer cram school also starts tomorrow, so I'll be busy."

At this time Fuyuumi who attended the same cram school as me tilted her head and said:

"Next week is when vacation starts, right? Since we have a one week long vacation, it shouldn't be a problem to spend two or three nights at a summer training camp, I think."

"Uuuh—"

Damn, is it necessary to reveal all of that?!

"I see. So let's make arrangements for the summer training camp then."

The marker squeaked as Masuzu used it to jot down the schedule on the whiteboard..

"Where should we go to? To the seaside? The mountains?"

"The seaside!"

Hime exclaimed loudly, which was very strange.

"It's because I've never seen the sea, so the seaside would be good."

Masuzu smiled and nodded:

"Then this time the summer training camp will be our 'maiden voyage[4]'."

"'Maiden voyage' doesn't mean that..."

Anyway, isn't it surprising that she has 'never seen the sea'? Or am I the only *person who doesn't know that people like that are somewhat normal?*

"Hey, Hime. When you say you've 'never seen the sea', do you actually mean you've 'never been there'?"

"Correct. As a result, I've usually watch movies on the Internet, and the wallpaper for my PC is the beach at Ouvea island."

"Oh—"

Even though I didn't know where this Ouvea island was, it seemed like Hime really expressed deep feelings towards the sea.

"This time, we'll have to make do with Funase beach. After all, there's no way we go to New Caledonia[5]."

"Ahh, so Ouvea Island was actually there? That's really far away."

From here it would only take an hour tram ride to reach the Funase coast, so it would be the obvious choice.

—Hey! W-Wait! If this keeps going on, they'll finish the travel plans.

"O-Oh yeah, Fuuyumi! Isn't Michel going to come back from Tokyo? Before, you said that you arranged dates with him so you'd be very busy, right?"

"Ahh, it looks like he'll have to stay in Tokyo for a while longer. It seems there's something he absolutely cannot miss, no matter what."

"Something he absolutely cannot miss?"

"He said there's this television station that's going to re-broadcast his favorite anime."

"Michel———!"

So that hot college student guy was an anime otaku?!

Anyway, you would actually tolerate it when he says that anime is more important than his girlfriend, A-chan?! You have no problem making your fictional boyfriend like that?

"It can be helped. Specially since it's not being broadcast over here."

"[...]"

The important thing isn't that—?

Then I guess I'll have to change the direction of my attack.

"But Masuzu, how will we manage the budget? A trip to the beach, plus accommodations and travel costs, must be at least twenty thousand yen per person."

"Well, since we've become an official club, we'll have club funds that we'll be able to allocate. Right, Fuyuumi-san?"

Masuzu looked at Fuyuumi with eyes full of anticipation, but—

"It's not possible to obtain funds immediately. We must apply and pass the student council budget committee review before it's okay."

"Then let's pass it."

"Unfortunately the budget committee won't be held until next semester."

"Arara…"

Masuzu's expression looked sullen, but I had a big smile on my face. Great, I was in luck!

Even better, the two o'clock bell just happened to ring, which was the perfect time to end school. Classes on the first day ended at noon. Thus, the school closing time was earlier than usual.

"Well then, we'll settle this thing about a training trip later!"

I put my bag over my shoulder and stood up. In short, I wanted to delay this matter, and leave the entire question unsettled.

"No, we have to reach a conclusion today."

It seemed like Masuzu had seen through my strategy as she spoke decisively.

"We're going to Eita-kun's house."

"Ah?"

"We're going to continue our meeting at Eita-kun's house."

Hime and Fuyuumi's eyes glimmered as they leaned forward:

"We can go to Eita's house? Can we? Is it fine if we go?"

"R-Right! I also want to settle the decision today, so in that case it's not as if we had another choice!"

"...Just wait, oi..."

These two girls seemed more excited than when the training trip was mentioned.

Masuzu took off the white cloth and packed it into her bag:

"Now that that's settled, let's get going immediately."

"I said wait! Don't ignore me - the house host - and make decisions on your own!"

"Ara, since it's Eita-kun's house, isn't it also considered my house? The boyfriend's house is the girlfriend's house. The girlfriend's house is also the girlfriend's house."

"That doesn't make sense!"

The situation was starting to move towards something I couldn't anticipate.

These guys actually wanted to come to my house together. I had a really bad feeling about this.

◆

So I took this group of 'self-proclaimed maidens' along with me to my home just like that.

When we passed the children's playground, a lady that brought her child was watching us as we proceeded one by one. 'Isn't that Eita from the Kidou Family?', 'Oh dear, he's even bringing four cute girls with him!', 'So incredible!', 'Considering that he was like *that* in middle school...' *Wait a minute, Aunt Tanaka. Just a second, what is this* that *that you're talking about? What* is *'that'?!*

"So, I wonder what type of spiritual boundary will have Eita's castle that protects this territory in this world? I'm very interested."

"Eita-kun's room really makes one full of anticipation, fufufu, *especially* under the bed… right?"

"If Kidou-kun doesn't have anything against it, I-I'll h-help with dinner."

Each of those three seemed to look forward to 'something', and Masuzu's looked especially terrible.

Only Chiwa alone stared at her feet while walking with heavy footsteps. Normally she was the noisiest of the lot, but today she seemed to lack the energy, even back when we were in the club room.

I pulled on Chiwa's arm and led us slightly away from the other three.

"What's wrong? Are you okay?"

"W-What?"

"You don't look too well. You shouldn't be hungry yet."

Chiwa smiled weakly and scratched her head.

"I really can't compare with Ei-kun. How did you know?"

"It's obvious that I'll notice, just for how many years have we known each other?"

Chiwa raised her head and looked at me, her eyes slowly teared up.

She threw her entire body against me and hugged me.

"Ugyugyugyugygyugyuuuu! Ei-kun——————! Ei-kun Ei-kun! Ei-kun Ei-kun!"

"Q-Quiet! What would we do if the others saw this?"

I hurriedly tried to cover Chiwa's mouth as I glanced to the three of them who still walked in the distance— Phew, they didn't notice. Perhaps they were still too excited about the 'pornography in my room'. It couldn't have been something like that, right?

Chiwa hugged me and buried her face in my chest. Her nose spasmed uncontrollably, while sniffling.

"Why? Why was Ai earlier than me? Why aren't I the first one?"

Good grief, she's like this because of that*?*

"There's no reason for you to be so fixated on that. After all, there is no such a thing as 'the earlier childhood friend wins'."

Chiwa's swaying body made a motion that spelled, 'No, no, no'.

"But I am Ei-kun's childhood friend! I'm obviously the only one!"

"As if it could be like that. Try to think, didn't you too have other friends when you were little?"

"Yeah, for example, Mi-tan who moved to Hokkaido, or Sakaki-chan who left to Fifenel Middle School."

"You see? It's the same for me. Fuyuumi just happened to be one among them, right?"

Chiwa gave a 'uuh~~' sound and lowered her head.

"Also, when we're talking about childhood friends, there is no need to consider the time period."

"Time period?"

"That would be the 'length' of the time two people have spent together. If the getting to know as early as possible mattered, then wouldn't the obstetrician at the birth clinic be the one with the deepest relationship? That can't be correct, right?"

Chiwa raised her head, and stared at me with wide teary eyes, just like a Chihuahua.

"I am the person who Ei-kun has known for the longest?"

"Yeah, it's you by far."

Chiwa's formerly very upset expression brightened like a blooming flower.

"[...] ...Ehe♪"

Chiwa jumped onto me and hugged my back, forcing me to carry her.

"H-Hey, get off, Chiwa! This is really embarrassing!"

"Butbutbutbut, but, for me, Ei-kun has also been the absolute first!"

Chiwa's ribbons pattered as they hit my face. It seems like she was rubbing her face against my back. The lady nearby began to whisper again, 'The feeling from the old days is better.', 'When they get married, the wife will definitely be the one running the household.', 'I think his wife will act up with him all the time and will have to make a living off of a ten thousand yen allowance.' About that fourth thing, Suzuki-san, please do not play predictions with my future.

"Shouldn't you just give it a rest already?!"

Right when I yelled that, Chiwa nimbly jumped off my back.

I looked back over my shoulder, and found Chiwa with her skirt fluttering and wearing a special smile.

"Ei-kun, I love you!"

After she made this shocking confession of love, she ran ahead to the front where Summer, Autumn, and Winter were walking.

"Yeah, yeah…"

I love you, huh?

Since we were small, how many times has she said that?

Each time I shared a snack with her, made a hamburger steak, and things like that, she'd always confess— If I counted all of them, the number should be in the three-digits by now.

"Really— Everyone. You guys are too excited, we're just going to Ei-kun's house— I'm going over every day, so I'm tired of it already— Even for today, I'll have dinner there—"

Thus, akin to the airs of a senpai, Chiwa displayed the 'air of a childhood', she addressed everyone with her usual attitude. On the other hand, Fuyuumi looked as if she tasted something very sour. You could call this a trade - off of sorts.

As we arrived in front of my house, we all spotted the tall woman walking over from the other side.

She was wearing a white shirt with vintage jeans, dressed casually, and swaying unsteadily as she walked.

Lack of sleep combined with eyes open or closed, one could barely tell— It was impossible to mistake who this was.

"Saeko-san, welcome home!"

"Heya there, Eita, might as well say welcome home!"

I ran near her and Saeko-san smiled, revealing her white teeth.

This was my aunt Kiryuu Saeko-san.

She had taken the role of my guardian as I had been abandoned by my parents. She usually slept over at her company due to work, so we typically saw each other only once every ten days.

"Ah— It's Saeko-san! Hello!"

"Hey Chihuahua-chan, how are you?! You're full of energy, as usual."

Chiwa rushed over and greeted Saeko-san, and the other three followed suit.

"I heard about you guys. You're the 'Society for Bringing Out Your Something Something', right? I am Kiryuu Saeko, Eita's onee-san! Kyun-Kyun[6]!"

"Wuah—"

I didn't want have anything to do with this. Even though she was my guardian, I didn't want anything to do with this.

Probably perceiving everyone's subtle expressions, Saeko-san laughed out loud.

"I was just trying to start off with a little gag~~ Well, I'm Eita's aunt."

"We don't need that kind of opening joke..."

Well, she does look younger than her age. If her appearance or her personality were the only things considered, no one would consider her in her thirties.

"Well, which one of these girls is Eita's girlfriend?"

My childhood friend, ex-girlfriend, and fiancé's expressions all froze and went 'hic'!

Only my 'girlfriend' revealed a rosy smile and stepped forward.

"I am glad to meet you, Oba-sama. My name is Natsukawa Masuzu. Please let's get along from here on. I am currently in a pure relationship with Eita-kun ."

Saeko-san smiled wryly and shook her head as soon as she heard her:

"No, no. The one I want to know about isn't this 'fake' kind."

Masuzu and I simultaneously held our breath and looked at each other.

How come?

How come Saeko-san's able to realize about this fake deal?

Saeko-san laughed, and used her finger with nail polish on it to poke my chest:

"Come on, just say it. The one you *really like*, which one is it?"

"N-No! I'm..."

Because it was too sudden, I couldn't let out a confident voice.

The one I really like*? What is Saeko-san talking about— Does she mean, like, being lovers? If that's the case, the answer would be, 'none of them'. Not only was there 'no one' among the girls here, but there was 'no one' in existance* anywhere. *There is no such thing as a girl* I *like.*

However, if I said that out loud right here, it would completely destroyed my arrangement with Masuzu as a fake boyfriend, and it would cause all of our hard work to dissolve into thin air.

Of course, the other three girls did not remain silent.

"Ei-kun?"

Chiwa's wide eyes stared at me, and they looked as if they were anticipating something.

"Eita...?"

Hime grabbed my shirt and pulled hard. *Ah— Hime-chan, you'll pull my shirt out of shape. Please don't pull that strong.*

"Stamp…?"

Of course the person who whispered that was Fuyuumi. And I certainly wouldn't stamp it!

The only one left was, most critically, Masuzu— but she only used her eyes to stare at me.

The expression was very rare, as if it exposed Masuzu's 'fragility'.

Damn...

What's wrong, Natsukawa Masuzu? Isn't this the right time for you to use your witty language abilities and pull through?

Why do you acting like an ordinary person receiving a huge shock?!

Why are you staring at me with those eyes…

I have no choice but to pull this off by myself, huh?

"What are you saying, Saeko-san? I don't get what you mean."

"Un?"

Even though my back was sweating like mad, I still desperately declared the love achievements that Masuzu and I had.

"Masuzu and I are really ~ seriously going out, we are totally lovey-dovey. We always go home together, and we go to the cafe to drink tea, coffee, and cola… After that we always go home together."

"You go home after you finish drinking, it's kinda disappointing~"

"No— At that time when Masuzu confessed to me, I really couldn't stand it! After all, it was in front of the entire class! The first thing that I thought was that it was a curse from the gods! Hahahaha!"

Giving praise to one's wife. This should do it, right?

Is it just me, or does Masuzu face look very disappointed in me…?

"———Eita, you are missing the point."

My heart jumped a little bit.

What? W-Was there something strange I said?

"Well, I for one, Eita—"

"Y-Yes!"

"I'm hungry."

"....Ha?"

My eyes turned into small dots.

"It so happens to be that I am suuuper hungryyyyyyy gyuu~~"

Saeko-san leaned on me as she collapsed little by little.

Her face was ghastly pale, and her hands were shivering cold.

"Because of the continuous mayhem lately, I haven't slept, haven't eaten, *haven't slept, haven't eaten…*"

"Please say that kind of thing sooner!"

"I'm sworry~ I wanted to first establish the identity of Eita's cute onee-san. Dokyun-Dokyun."

"Enough with the 'kyun-kyun'! Please think about your age!"

Honestly, this person.

She's my guardian, but actually a weird person. She's a weird person, but actually my guardian. That's Kiryuu Saeko-san.

#2: Love Test is Mayhem

#2 デレテストで修羅場

Onigiri[7], sausages, fried eggs.

Once I placed these dishes on the table, they quickly disappeared from the edge of it and went straight into Saeko-san's stomach. And as usual, she didn't chew properly.

As I continued to cook another leek and some miso soup, I said:

"If you were that hungry, couldn't you have eaten some fast food to sustain yourself?"

"But I rarely see Eita at home, and I want to eat your hand-made dishes~"

Seeing Saeko-san's smile with grains of rice stuck on her cheek, I felt quite happy. Learning about cooking really had been a worthwhile choice.

I invited Masuzu and the rest of them to sit on the sofa in the living room, but because it could only accommodate three people, Chiwa kneeled on a cushion by the carpet.

Apart from Chiwa, the remaining three girls were all stunned by Saeko-san's eating manners. Well, it would scare the average person, since her speed at rice devouring easily surpassed Chiwa's.

Saeko-san drank the miso soup like water, and gave a huge sigh, 'Buuhaaa~'.

"Well, that's all… Good night!"

"Good night."

Saeko-san laid her head down on the table and began to snore loudly. Her irrational ability to fall asleep anywhere never changed.

Masuzu's eyes were round and wide as she asked:

"Has she fallen asleep?"

"Yeah, she's always like this after eating."

I took an unbuttoned cardigan sweater from the living room wall and draped it over Saeko-san's shoulder.

"She says that sleeping on the table is the best, especially for short-term elimination of sleepiness."

'This is an occupational disease[8]—', Saeko-san would always smile as she said so.

Hime tilted her head.

"Should we move somewhere else?"

"Don't worry about it. She'll wake up in about thirty minutes anyway."

"But I want to see Eita's room."

"Not happening."

I refused flat-out.

Because you'd definitely rummage through someone else's house! You'd try to find porn magazines!

Ever since earlier, Fuyuumi had also been looking around the living room with her hands on her knees, sometimes clenching into a fist and sometimes relaxing. She was completely restless.

Then it dawned on me.

"Let me say it first, this room doesn't have any official seals[9]. Understood?"

"A-Are you picking a fight? Why would I want that kind of thing?"

Naturally, you'd take it and stamp the marriage registration form, isn't that right?

When the dialogue was about to digress, Masuzu cleared her throat.

"It's about time we started the meeting. After all, we came here for a reason."

"Hey, wait a minute."

Thus, Chiwa started.

"What's with this? Aren't you already sick and tired of seeing my room?"

"Not that! Before we start, I want to clarify one thing."

Chiwa turned her gaze directly at Masuzu:

"Earlier, what did Saeko-san meant when she was talking about 'fake'?"

Guh!

...As expected, we have *to continue with that topic, of course.*

"I'm also interested. What's the deal with the president being 'fake'?"

"Either Impostor or Imitation[10], does it have to do with something like that?"

Even Hime and Fuyuumi voiced their doubts.

Masuzu gave a big sigh.

"If it's about that, I would also like to know about it. Even though it's clearly our first meeting, she just said something like that. I'm very troubled."

Chiwa glared at me and spoke:

"But Ei-kun also seems rather nervous?"

"W-What are you talking about?"

I originally wanted to play dumb, but my pitch went unnaturally high.

But...

Recently Chiwa really had been quite sharp. At least with issues regarding Masuzu and me.

But as Chiwa was unable to find any more evidence, she had to drop the subject for the time being.

"So, we have to discuss how to manage the budget for the summer training camp."

"Right, is there any way we can quickly amass money?"

Hime raised her hand in response to Masuzu's question and said:

"And if everyone gets a Palt Daime?"

"…You surely mean Part Time, right?"

"Correct."

When Hime said 'Part Time', it sounded like the name of some spell or weapon. It really was unfathomable.

"We won't have time. In order to work, we need to get the school's permission first."

Fuyuumi said, very straitlaced.

"Eeh— no one actually follows that rule, right?"

"That won't do! Since I'm a club member now, I won't let you break the school rules."

'Phuu—', Chiwa stretched out her face.

"Besides, we won't make it 'til next week. There aren't that many offers for high school girls to look for part time jobs."

Chiwa shook her head and said, 'That's not the case at all'.

"A few days ago I saw an advertisement. It said that all you have to do is eat snacks and listen to an old man whine, and the salary is thirty thousand yen. I don't know what type of snacks are included, though."

"…Chiwa, please absolutely *do not* go to that place, okay?"

I firmly and unyieldingly urged her. This girl could really make people worry.

"Since it has come to this."

Masuzu's eyes shifted towards me.

"I guess I can only ask Eita-kun to put his body in use."

"Hm? What would be good about this at this time?"

"Everyone has two kidneys, and losing one is no big deal after all."

"You expect me to sell it?!"

This clearly was not me putting my body to good use. Rather, it would be my internal organs.

Why did I have to take this kind of risk for the sake of a summer training camp...

"You guys have been saying whatever you please from the beginning! Can you only come up with this kind of dangerous ideas? There's plenty more simple solutions!"

"Oh, like what?"

"Just have the training camp someplace nearby."

"Nearby?"

"How about the family restaurant in front of the station?"

The four of them booed when they heard this. *What? Are you guys that dissatisfied with the family restaurant business? They are facilities with fine air-conditioning, an unlimited supply of drinks for one hundred eighty yen, and it's also within a day's trip.*

"A family restaurant is of course out of question. When we're talking about a summer training camp, then of course it has to be the sea."

Masuzu asserted, and just when the discussion was about to hit the rocks—

"—Fine then. *I* will take all of you there then."

Saeko-san suddenly stood up.

Her eyes that were shut to narrow strings before, were now open perfectly wide. It seemed after that short sleep, she switched to awaken mode.

Masuzu, Hime, and Fuyuumi stared blankly, unable to be anything but stunned.

Saeko-san lazily brushed her hair up:

"What's wrong? Didn't you all want to go to the beach? My company has a health resort facility at Funase Beach. You can use it for two or three nights without a problem."

Fuyuumi leaned close to my ear and whispered:

"Err, that's really your oba-sama[11], right? Doesn't she look like a completely different person?"

"Yeah. Earlier, she was just in her 'sleep mode' after staying up all night."

The first time Chiwa and I had met Saeko-san, we were also astounded like this. Both her atmosphere and way of speaking changed like she was different person. Saeko-san in 'awaken mode' could be considered quite a beautiful woman. One would never think that this was a person capable of saying 'Kyun-Kyun' like she did before.

Masuzu had a stiff and wary expression.

"May I ask if you are implying that you will provide free accommodation for us?"

"That's not what I'm saying. You will need to provide an equivalent compensation."

Saeko-san looked at Masuzu's sharp eyes, smiled and said:

"Hey, Chihuahua, what do I do for a job?"

The sudden change of topic took Chiwa by surprise and she responded in a daze:

"A game creator, right?"

"No, I don't if you put it in such a formidable way."

Saeko-san banged on the table.

"I am— someone who makes lots of cute girls and hot boys appear in games, so they make people 'squuueeeeeaaaal!', that's the type of game I'm after!"

"[...]"

Even though there wasn't any need to say it in a formidable manner, there also was no need to say it so vulgarly… right?

"That would be gal-games[12] and otome-games[13]?"

"Ah, the pony-tailed girl over there seems to get it."

After being praised, Hime blushed somewhat happily. After all, she liked video games. Maybe she even played a game that Saeko-san had worked on.

On the other hand, the stiff disciplinary committee member only furrowed her eyebrows.

"I heard these kinds of works had a lot of shameless content. Could this be related to X-rated games?"

"My current project is rated 'appropriate for all ages'. Is the tsundere over there very familiar with those kinds of games?"

"O-O-Of course I'm not familiar with them! I only know about them due to my duties as a disciplinary committee member!"

Fuyuumi denied vehemently. But that being said, you should have protested about that 'tsundere' part.

With her eyes still probing, Masuzu asked:

"May I ask how gal-games are related to the offer of our accommodation?"

"Well, in short I'll let you take a look at this..."

Saeko-san took a flyer out of her bag, and we all leaned forward to take a look.

★ Use your 'Love Points' to Cool the Summer ❤ 'OreDere' Beauty Pagent ★

Organizer: SoftDunk (Inc.)

Venue: Funase Second Beach

Date: X/X/XX at X o'clock. Registration begins at X o'clock rain or shine.

Eligibility: a dere-dere girl between 10~20 years old

"Right now my company is making a new game called 'My Girlfriend Loves me Too Much!' or 'OreDere' for short. The purpose of this event is to draw interest and get some publicity."

"OreDere."

This abbreviation doesn't seem to reflect the existence of a 'girlfriend', but rather it seems to suggest 'I'm' dere[14]. But then again it's fine either way.

"If you're willing to participate in this competition, then I'll offer the accommodations I mentioned earlier."

Chiwa looked up at Saeko-san's face:

"What does the 'dere-dere girl' in the competition eligibility mean?"

"The competitors have to be on the stage and demonstrate 'how *dere* they are'. That's the main feature of this competition. That's why this competition is restricted to 'girls who feel dere to someone' as in 'girls who are in the middle of experiencing love'. Unfortunately, not many people have registered so it's a little bit of a problem—"

Saeko-san looked at Chiwa, Hime, and Fuyuumi, one by one.

"You three have all fallen for Eita, am I right?"

"——?!"

The three of them didn't make any noise, but there was an obvious change of atmosphere in the living room.

Chiwa's expression suddenly became very serious.

Hime blushed and lowered her head.

Fuyumi however… covered her face with her hands and started to pound on the ground wildly with her feet, causing the floor to shake. A-chan, please stop. Do you want to destroy my house?

"Fufu, you're very maidenly. Looks like you all satisfy the competition requirement."

Saeko-san very happily nodded her head in the direction of those three.

"Please wait."

Masuzu let out a firm voice.

"As I said before, *I* am Eita-kun's girlfriend. Why am I the only one you are excluding?"

"It's not due to reason, but rather due to intuition."

"Intuition, is it...?"

"Don't try to fool my intuition. I've created a massive number of all sorts of character types, and the story of how all these characters fell in love. All of this was made by me. In my shoes, it's not hard at all to understand how you guys rank in a 'dere scale'."

Masuzu frowned, unconvinced.

"However that's merely talk about a game, isn't it? It's just a fake reality, right?"

"It's exactly *because* it's fake."

Saeko-san's words were full of enthusiasm.

"In order to make the fake look real, you need to 'make the fake look more real than the real thing'. This is the most important detail in the game industry. As a result, I am very sensitive to whether the Romantic Feeling is authentic or not."

Masuzu's expression had originally been very stern, but it suddenly looked like it realized something.

At nearly the same time, I also realized it.

About this 'making the fake look more real than the real thing' earlier— Wasn't that more or less the same thing Masuzu had said to me a few times before?

"How about we run a little test?"

Saeko-san thus said.

"This is a simple psychological test that will measure your love points. It's a rare opportunity, so are Chihuahua and company up for it?"

The four of them looked at each other in confusion.

Not caring about their reactions, Saeko-san took her smart phone out again and began to read the questions aloud to herself.

Q:

There is a boy here that you hold very dear and think of very well.

Let's name him 'A'-ta— ...-kun.

"THAT'S NOT AN ALIAS!"

I said with a hoarse voice.

I wished that it could have been changed to 'B'-ta or 'C'-ta at least…!

Then 'A'-ta-kun says: 'This manga here is really interesting and totally awesome! This is the thing! Read it, read it!'— Suppose that he just won't shut up about it.

How would you react?

"So, let's start with Chihuahua."

Saeko-san completely ignored my protests and continued with the subject.

Chiwa's worried, 'um~', about ten seconds later came:

"Ei-kun's manga interests and mine don't really match."

"No, it's not about me. Remember that the topic is about 'A-ta-kun', all right?"

Chiwa responded, 'Oh, right', and nodded her head.

"Well, then I guess I'd give a try reading it? But if it's really boring, I'd just tell him so."

It was a very ordinary response.

But the manga that I'd recommend would definitely not be boring!

"Then the next, the pony-tailed girl."

"As long as Eita was the one who recommended it, I would read it no matter how boring it is."

Oh dear, Hime was as tender as always.

…But it was saddening that the subject still was on how *boring* it'd be.

Saeko-san tapped at the touchscreen as she nodded.

"Next up is the 'tsun' girl."

"Manga is just boring enough. I won't read that kind of thing!"

"Well, and the 'dere' girl."

"The Manga will give me an opportunity to speak more with Ta-kun, I ~ will definitely read it♪———— Wait, WHO'S THE DERE GIRL?!"

It seemed like Fuyuumi-san had developed a habit of being a 'Nori-Tsukkomi[15]', ergo there was no place for me to butt in myself.

"Finally, Natsukawa Masuzu."

Masuzu was the only one who she did not call by a nickname, somehow that beat being called out 'wicked tongue girl' in public, I guess.

I casually approached Masuzu from behind, and whispered to her:

—Hey, please give a good answer.

—Who do you think I *am*? Just leave it to me.

Thus, Masuzu's answer was...

"I would certainly take a look at the manga that 'A-ta-kun' recommended, but I would also lend him a manga that I would recommend."

"Reason being?"

"Even though it's important to understand the preferences of the person you love, it's also important to let him get to know you. I believe that this is most important in the relationship between boyfriend and girlfriend."

Chiwa and the rest of them all exclaimed, 'Wow'. As expected of Masuzu, she always responded with the most proper answer.

Saeko-san nodded and said, 'I see', as her fingers tapped away on the smart phone.

A little curious, I spoke up:

"Um, what have you been doing ever since we started?"

"This is an app game that my company is developing, and I borrowed the question from here. This game already has more than a million users who have responded, all of whom are girls in their teens and twenties."

"Heh…"

Girls certainly seemed to love psychological test problems like this pretty much.

Chiwa's body was shaking from anxiety.

"Then, Saeko-san, how were the results? Who has got the most love?"

"Ah, in first place is... [...] ...tsundere girl."

Fuyuumi's face turned alarmingly red.

"W-W-What is this!? W-W-Why would I be interested in someone li-li-liee Kidou-kun—"

No, it's A-ta-kun we're talking about, isn't it?

Saeko-san couldn't help but chuckle:

"When you said, 'an opportunity to speak more with him', isn't it obvious that this point would score rather highly? The innocent and sweet love can even be felt in the air, totally maiden-like."

Fuyuumi shook her head forcefully, her hair disheveled:

"It's absolutely a lie, lie, lie, lie, lie— It's a lie! I definitely don't just like Ta-kun! I la-like *so* much!"

The air around the scene instantly froze.

Chiwa's eyes seemed to overflow with the intent to kill, Hime's eyes were puzzled, and Masuzu gave a blank stare.

I was also extremely surprised.

Hey, you, you forgot about the existence of Michel again…

"That's what I said, it isn't like thiiiiiiiiiiiiiis! What I just said doesn't cooooouuuunt! Ai-chan is going to run outside!"

A-chan pounded her reddened face with both hands and quickly ran outside. She forgot her bag again, so I'd try to return it the day after in cram school.

"Then, in second place is Chihuahua."

As expected of Saeko-san, she was completely unmoved after the exposure of the tsundere heart.

"As for why you're ranked lower than the tsundere girl, that's because you're too intimate. Even though such sincere words signify that your relationship is very good, if the distance between you two is too close, the other party won't be able to see you in terms of love. You need to pay attention to that stuff."

"Ah-!"

Chiwa sank into silent contemplation, maybe because she felt that what had been said was reasonable.

"In third place is the pony-tailed girl. Your situation is the opposite of Chihuahua's, you should take a step closer to cut down the distance. Don't let your feelings lead everything. You still need to have everyday conversations, so that Eita… No, the point is that you need to get closer to 'A'-ta. This way you'll gradually enter a better relationship."

Hime eyes shined honestly and she nodded repeatedly. This almost felt like it was some kind of life consultation.

Then was— Masuzu.

"I'm in last place, is it?"

Even though her tone was indifferent, one could still see the frustration underneath.

This was maybe the first time I ever saw Masuzu with this expression.

"It's because your answer might be considered the 'exemplar answer'. And since it's *too* perfect, there is just no feeling of 'dere'."

"*Too* perfect?"

"If you were a couple going out for more than a year, then this answer would be absolutely right. However— You've only gone out for three months, right? Moreover, you're 15-year-old first year high school students, and this kind of answer is simply too beautiful."

I see.

There really is no flaw in Masuzu's answer. To try and share our feelings with our partners...

But compared to the real couples around us in our environment, it doesn't usually go like that.

I occasionally listen to Kaoru talk about the situations of the boys with a relationship that are in our class. The unpredictable highs and lows in their relationship are very intense. The usual case, where the girlfriends are nothing but filled with talks about their boyfriends, and the opposite also happens when the boyfriends do nothing but speak about their girlfriends. They keep doing nothing but 'praising' their loved one.

If we wanted to act like a high school couple, then the correct answer would need to leak a even more 'lovestruck mind' than what's normal.

"When one uses a cell phone or smart phone to do this kind of test, it will ask the respondent to provide their age, sex, occupation, and the number of years they've been in a relationship, and questions like that. Thus even if the responses are identical, the score may still vary."

Masuzu stared unwaveringly at Saeko-san's eyes.

"I refuse to accept this. What can this kind of test possibly tell you about us?"

So, with that attitude it looks like she isn't going to surrender, no matter want.

"…Hooo? Okay."

Saeko-san contemplated as she stroked her chin.

"If you are willing to say that much, then why don't you, Natsukawa Masuzu, also participate in the competition? After all, I'm the host, so if you can win the championship, then I'll admit that you're his 'girlfriend' or whatever. I'll attest that as Eita's guardian."

"That condition won't be changed in hindsight, right?"

"Of course not."

It seemed like there were invisible sparks scattering between Masuzu and Saeko-san.

Maybe because she was roused, Chiwa also stood up:

"I'm also participating!"

She declared, her eyes re-ignited with that raging fire.

"Even though this time we were a little careless and allowed things to get too intimate, this is an excellent opportunity to settle things with Natsukawa!"

I felt like the situation just kept growing stranger and stranger.

"I also want to participate."

Even Hime raised her hand.

She used her other hand to hold onto my shirt tightly.

"If I win the competition, then will I get a rank upgrade from ex-girlfriend to current girlfriend?"

She radically said. Anyway, was that some kind of confession?

Saeko-san, being very satisfied, nodded repeatedly.

"Let's go with that, the girl that wins the crown in this competition will be recognized as Eita's bride. I'll give my seal of approval as Eita's guardian."

"—Really? So *you* will seal it?"

This voice came from the living room door. I turned my head to look, and it was A-chan sweating from head to foot, her shoulders undulating up and down as she panted. It seemed like she noticed that she forgot her bag and thus had turned back.

She pointed straight at us:

"I-It can't be helped! I'll also participate!"

Haha, things are really heating up here.

Things are heating up.

Yeah...

I wish I could run away… I really do…

#3: Game Love Mentality is Mayhem

#3 ゲーム恋愛脳な修羅場

After Masuzu and the rest had gone home, Saeko-san went to take a bath.

It seemed like in the evening she had to go to work again, so I decided to make her a bento. For the sake of nutrition, I wanted to focus on vegetables and limit the oil used… So I decided to make a stew. A chizuken stew[16], since my aunt tried it once before and said it was 'tasty, tasty' as she ate.

When the ingredients in the pot started boiling, Saeko-san walked into the living room while wiping her wet hair. Even though she was only wearing a tank top and hot pants, I didn't react in the face of such a rough dressing manner. I was accustomed to it.

…But before I had gotten used to it, to be honest, I had always been very restless. After all, Saeko-san did have an amazing figure.

Saeko-san twitched her nose and sniffed.

"How wonderful. A loving wife's bento."

"Why is it a *loving wife's* bento?"

I used my chopsticks to poke the lotus root to see how it was, it still needed another three minutes.

Saeko-san took a beer from the refrigerator.

"You're such a good nephew, I can't believe that such a terribly awful pair of parents managed to give birth to a child like you, it's a real mystery."

"Haha, please stop. After all, you're taking care of me now, so if it's the least I can—"

"Eita is the one who should stop it. It's just natural that I take care of you. After all, we're family."

"…That's true, I'm sorry."

I looked up as I tried to reflect on this sudden outburst of happiness that was shot at me.

Saeko-san drained the can of beer in an instant:

"Oh, right, somehow when it comes to those four———— Do you want to turn your life into a mayhem? Or is it a harem perhaps?"

"I refuse either."

I took out another can of beer from the refrigerator.

"If you pick the mayhem, you should take some self-defense classes. Also, you should frequently put a copy of Shounen Jump under your shirt, so that when you're stabbed it'll lessen the penetration."

"I don't think that kind of thing could stop it…"

Furthermore, if I put it there, it seemed like it would have been difficult to move.

"If you pick the harem and don't carefully develop a plan plus manage the flags, it will be difficult to conquer five people simultaneously. If you mess up one or two options, an irreparable chain reaction will explode, so don't be lazy and forget to save."

"If you happen to find a memory card for my life, please buy it quickly."

I casually answered as I turned off the stove.

"Huh? Five people? Why are there *five* people?"

"I'm also a capture target."

"I refuse."

Saeko-san shrugged lightly.

"If that's so, then just pick one and date her."

"...That's *why* I am dating. With *Masuzu*."

However, Saeko-san shrugged once more, as if she still didn't believe it.

"That kid, isn't she the type that will never reveal what's on her heart? Even though she tried to act 'dere' just then because of the atmosphere... Honestly, it looks like her problems are much deeper than just that."

Yeah— As expected, she really is *keen.*

To be honest, even I didn't know what Masuzu was really thinking.

"Well, anyhow, it's not like she really is a bad person or something like that. In fact, she also has her good points."

"Eh— Such as?"

"First of all, there's the face, and after that it's the face, and um, ah, well, there is also the face."

Isn't that strange?

Besides the face, what more can I say about her that's good...?

No, of course there is something else. Like, her looks, her appearance, or how she seems to the eye.

Saeko smiled as if she saw through everything and said:

"A beautiful flower will always have poison and spines, this is something that the world dictates. Just be careful that you aren't pricked."

"Yes, yes."

I picked up the pot, and the scent of soy sauce drifted through the kitchen.

And then I suddenly thought of something.

Just what does Masuzu usually eat anyways?

◆

Masuzu was using her lips.

After I had bid farewell to Saeko-san and ate dinner with Chiwa, I was called to the usual cafe by SMS message. I found Masuzu sucking on a silvery pre-packaged jelly drink[17]. It was the kind of thing that office workers often ate when they hadn't have any time to eat.

I sat in the seat opposite of her and ordered a coke from the waitress.

"Could it be that, *that's* actually your dinner?"

"Well, that's how it is, is there something wrong?"

I didn't know what she was targeting, but Masuzu inflated the drink bag with a 'phu' while she pouted.

"But when you have that, don't you feel like you haven't eaten anything? You should order a sandwich or pasta or something."

"I don't like that kind of obsessing eating behavior. As long as it simply fills an empty stomach, anything is okay."

That being said, I didn't think I had ever seen this girl eat anything proper before.

The morning when she had prepared food in my house, she cooked instant curry, and when she was at our club she only drank tea.

"Those lovestruck people will often say stuff like, 'Let's eat dinner together next time!', 'Oh, I know a really nice place to eat.' And as they mutter about vague topics and chat, they stuff themselves with animal carcasses, eggs, as well as plant seeds, roots, and grind leaves. Don't you think this behavior exhibits the revolting behavior of those in love?"

"…No, you really shouldn't say that much..."

Somehow she seemed to be in a really bad mood.

But this wasn't difficult to understand, since she had just been discredited by Saeko-san.

It was about eight o'clock at night, and the store was almost filled entirely with student couples enjoying the summer night together. In other people's eyes, we were the same, right? If you just took a look, it was impossible to see that we were fakes——— But this refers to an ordinary situation.

"So? What did you want to talk about?"

"There are some things I want to hear from you."

Masuzu took a sip of the iced coffee she ordered.

"The first thing's about Fuyuumi Ai. I never expected she would actually be your 'childhood friend'. I couldn't help but to be surprised."

"Like I said at the club, I didn't deliberately try to hide it."

"I know that's true. But the thing I wanted to confirm wasn't about that—— but whether Fuyuumi-san actually likes you or not."

The Coke that I ordered was brought to the table.

I drank half of it in one gulp.

"Eh, how am I supposed to know? Maybe she just didn't like the taste of how she was robbed of her position as childhood friend by Chiwa"

Because I couldn't mention the thing about the fiancée, I could only answer like this.

Masuzu sighed deeply.

"You really aren't honest. You're even more of a tsundere than Fuyuumi-san is."

"S-S-Shut up! Just leave me alone!"

"I'll change the question then..."

Masuzu poked the glass that was covered in condensed water and said:

"Fuyuumi's boyfriend, whom she calls 'Daigoro', is just a cover, right?"

"[...]"

I said nothing, and Masuzu seemed to take it as my tacit approval.

"Well, it doesn't matter how one sees it, that's how it looks. In fact, I wonder how come Harusaki-san and Akishino-san haven't noticed by now."

"Leaving Hime aside for now, I think Chiwa is starting to become suspicious."

Fuyuumi often forgot about her own setting, so it wouldn't be long before she couldn't even hide it from Hime anymore. When that time came, what would happen to her position as Master? I was a little worried.

"I have a simple question. Can you listen to me and not get angry?"

"...What?"

Masuzu stared at me with serious eyes.

"Where do Harusaki-san, Akishino-san, and Fuyuumi-san find something good in a 'Preaching Lecturing Bookworm' like yourself?"

"And I'm not supposed to get angry?!"

A Preaching Lecturing Bookworm...

A Preaching Lecturing Bookworm *is it...?!*

"What's with that?! Why did you have to give me that kind of nickname?!"

As a matter of fact, this was just badmouthing!

"Because Eita is always lecturing, isn't he? You lecture me, you also lecture Mana, and still lecture Akishino-san. As a matter of fact, didn't you capture Fuyuumi-san by lecturing something?"

"You are just saying whatever you please! And don't speak of someone else's life as if he was the protagonist of a gal-game!"

Masuzu tilted her head with an 'Eh?'.

"Even though I don't know much about it, but are gal-games like that?"

"Huh? …Yeah, I guess so. Though I'm also not very sure. But there have to be some gal-games that are like that."

The male lead is only a tool to face the beautiful female protagonists. To be in a form that allows confronting and straightening out the personal problems of the girls and then succeed → which then gives a chance to capture them. 'Persuade' and 'Capture' are the key points, Saeko-san had said this once before.

"Personally, I have never seen the point of gal-games, even though you end up inside a game, yet you still have to deal with love."

"No, rather, it's exactly because it's inside a game, right? After all, love in the real world can be very complicated, in games that stuff is all dealt through shortcuts."

"Hee…"

Masuzu opened her eyes wide.

"This has to be the first time I feel like I agree with Eita. It looks like you *can* occasionally say sensible things after all."

"Saying 'occasionally' is unnecessary."

"You are merely a lecturing thief."

"What happened to the preaching bookworm?"

When you talk with this girl, the barrage of nicknames just never stopped.

"Ara, when you sweep away the hearts of girls, aren't you in a sense a 'thief'?"

"…You are really sugar-coating your words."

"'Gal-Game Male Protagonist = Lecturing Thief' Story".

Even I had never heard of that.

"Then let's get back to the question— What do those three girls like about you?"

"How should I know? Go ask them yourself."

"I want to hear Eita's own thoughts."

"Even if you say that..."

Those girls were super weird. I had no clue what they were thinking.

"First of all, Hime likes me because I can share her delusions of her 'past life'? Kind of like having a common interest."

"Yeah, Akishino-san is easy to understand... Fuyuumi-san then?"

"I don't know. I have no clue."

In kindergarten, it seemed like she had to confess to me to find out about 'the secret great place to watch fireworks'. However, that couldn't possibly be the case right now. I actually didn't understand what type of interest she had in me.

"Harusaki-san then?"

"Chiwa?"

I tilted my head and said.

"Chiwa's 'love' isn't a romantic kind of 'love'. It's a familial kind of 'love'. I said this before, but she's basically like a little sister to me."

Even though from her view *I* was the 'little brother'.

Chiwa definitely liked me, but it was the kind of 'family member' love.

"Is that really the case?"

Masuzu's eyes coldly peered over my face.

"Is that something you believe——— Or rather, is it something that you *hope* to be true?"

"Something I hope? What do you mean?"

"Because you're afraid of losing Harusaki Chiwa— This 'family member'."

"...?"

I didn't understand what Masuzu was saying.

Isn't it obvious that one's afraid of losing one's family members? What does this have to do with what we were talking about?

"Whatever. Let's not talk about that for now."

When the waitress came to refill water left, Masuzu took advantage of the moment and changed the topic.

"Your oba-sama, What kind of person is she?"

"A child inside an adult's body... Think of her like that. Her views and everything she experiences, she pushes it all into 'game' standards."

There are more people who are akin to Saeko-san. In fact, most of them are probably considered geniuses. Among people who create games, this kind of personality seems to be common, though.

"How bothersome. If she were simply a 'Lovestruck Mentality', there would be a lot of approaches in order to deal with her. But with people poisoned by love in games, what we could call a 'Game Love Mentality', I don't have the foggiest idea on how to deal with that."

"That's exactly how it is."

Even though Masuzu was very well-versed on the topic of shounen manga, she probably wasn't very familiar with gal-games, ero-games, and stuff in that category.

"Having said that, even though she was relying on intuition, I must have lost my edge if she was actually able to see through our little act."

Masuzu stirred her coffee with her straw as the melted ice had made it watery.

"What's wrong? It's rare for you admit your weaknesses."

"Even if I look like this, I'm very confident in my 'camouflage'. As long as I put on the act of a good girl, adults are sure to be tricked. To have *that* miss-fire, I'm shocked."

"…I see."

I had also been hit by that. After all, I thought my own act had been pretty good, too.

At this moment, Masuzu showed an unfathomable expression.

"Why does even Eita look depressed?"

"Why are you asking?"

"Even if our fake relationship gets revealed, you don't lose anything at all. As a matter of fact, shouldn't you feel happy?"

"How could that be possible?!"

My voice raised.

"Since you and I are officially recognized as a couple in school, if everything was exposed as a lie *now*, wouldn't things get really awkward after that? Since we have come this far, I'm in for a penny, in for a pound."

"[...]"

"If you're willing to return my notebook, of course, that would be a completely different matter. In that case, I'd break up with you at the spot."

When I said that, the corners of Masuzu's mouth gradually rose into a smile.

"You've come to say some really conceited things. When you're obviously just a preaching, lecturing, thieving bookworm."

"Hahaha, what kind of thief is that?"

This admitting and well-behaved Masuzu wasn't like her at all.

A poisonous tongue and arrogance suited her better.

"What type of thief? A very foul thief."

"You really don't have to explain."

"After breaking into a lone college girl's home to look for her underwear, and scattering said underwear all across the room, you started to sniff and sniff all over the odors while you rolled about. When the student came back and started screaming, you started to lecture in a poor Kansai accent, 'Panties must be white! There shouldn't be black or red ones!' When she called the police, you started shouting, 'I'm guilty as charged! Guilty as charged!', wore panties on your head and fled."

"You really didn't have to explain!"

Or rather, just let it go! The guests around us are looking!

"After being arrested, you became a bookworm in prison."

"Don't be so persistent to finish!"

The two college girls who sat in the neighboring space hurriedly left, and their faces looked twisted as if they had seen something really disgusting.

…G-Good gracious...

"In any case, just as that 'filthy thing' said, I can't be depressed anymore. Since that's the case, I'll follow your aunt's condition and win the crown at the this miss contest."

"[...]"

Was 'that filthy thing' referring to me?

Not 'boyfriend'?

"Of course, the *'filthy thing'* has to lend some assistance as well. So that we can make Harusaki-san and the others recognize that *I'm* your girlfriend while we are on the boarding house trip."

"Before that, could you acknowledge that I'm a *human being*…?"

As expected, it really would be better if my 'girlfriend' was just a little bit more well-behaved after all.

#4: When my Best Friend wants to go to the Sea, it's Mayhem

#4 海に行きたい親友の修羅場

It was 5:30 P.M., a day had passed.

After the end of summer cram school, Fuyuumi Ai, Asoi Kaoru and I all went to the family restaurant in front of the station. It had already become a habit to drink tea in a relaxed manner before we went home like this.

"Eh, a boarding house?!"

Kaoru, who was slowly eating the cream off of his chocolate parfait next to me, got big eyes.

"Finally, the 'Maiden's Club' is finally doing something a proper club would do."

"Fufufu, this is mainly all thanks to me!"

Across from me, Fuyuumi very proudly took a huge bite of banana from her banana parfait.

That being said, I only drank coke. Even though ordering drinks alone was rather expensive, I felt that it was better than to eat sweats before dinner. Furthermore, Chiwa was probably waiting at home for me, being hungry.

"Thanks to *you*, my peaceful days are moving farther and farther away."

"You're talking like that again, Eita—"

Kaoru smiled wryly.

"Eita, you should be happier. With Chihuahua-chan and Natsukawa-san, along with Akishino-san and A-chan, aren't you monopolizing all the cute girls at Hane High?"

"Um…"

"As long as it were a boy, it wouldn't be weird for anyone to feel envy. I wouldn't find it surprising if there already were one or two straw dolls that are set on you."

"Yeah, that's actually possible—"

Today, when I had been in the toilet stall (large) at cram school, Yamamoto-kun from the football club was whispering in the neighboring stall, '*STAB*— Not Popular. Ye, not Popular. I'm just not popular— *STAB*. Not popular at all.

Notoopularnotpopular. The reason why I play soccer? To be popular. I also tried being in a band... I didn't get any more popular. Why am I not Popular? *STAB*. Why are you the only one being popular—? *STAB*. For Becoming Popular... *STAB* I can't forgive you—*STAB*—!' Rather than whispering, at the end he had basically been shouting. Sorry, Yamamoto-kun. If I could have, I would have really liked if we could switch places. I *really* would have done that, *STAB*.

"Then, Kaoru, even *you* are envious of me?"

"Hmm? Hmm...~"

Kaoru tilted his head, and with a somewhat lonely expression that I couldn't understand said:

"Well, Yeah. You *could* say I'm envious."

"Eeeh?"

"But rather than you, the one I'm envious of are Natsukawa-san and the other girls..."

"...?"

What does that mean? Why would you envy those*?*

Fuyuumi pounded the table with her fingers.

"Listen, Kaoru. Today is my treat, so when we are in the boarding house, can you please send me some mails?"

"I get it, one in the morning and one in the afternoon."

They nodded to each other, leaving me in a daze.

"Have you always been texting each other like this? Even though you have this many chances to talk at each other during cram school, you still have that much more to say?"

Kaoru smiled wryly.

"No, no, we're establishing an alibi."

"Alibi?"

Fuyuumi lowered her head, a little embarrassed:

"These are supposed to be texts sent by my Michel. Over three days and two nights, it would be weird if I didn't get any mails from my boyfriend, right?"

"J- Jien-Otsu…!"

It seems like Fuyuumi had become a part of a club she truly belonged to.

"But if the sender displays 'Kaoru', wouldn't this plan just fail?"

"No problem, we just have to randomly register a free mailbox."

If you're precautious to that level, then you're probably on eyelevel with Masuzu.

"But isn't it better if you give up pretending to 'have a boyfriend'? It looks somewhat tiresome."

Fuyuumi shrugged.

"You're dumb. With this kind of thing, it'd be the worst if I stopped halfway."

"Ah, is that so?"

"It's exactly like that! After lying once, one should take responsibility to carry it out till the bitter end!"

As one would expect of a disciplinary committee member. Even when it comes to lying, they are truly responsible.

On the other hand, Kaoru was resting his chin on his hand at the table.

"That being said, since you're going to the sea... That's nice~. I heard Funase was quite beautiful, not to mention that there are even high-class houses and top-level restaurants, right?"

"That's around the third beach. We'll be staying at the second beach, which is full of tattered hotels."

"Even if that's the case, I'm still envious. Even if it's just once, I would also like to enjoy playing at the beach."

Kaoru's eyes looked into the distance, and he gloomily sighed.

When he mentioned 'just once', did that mean Kaoru had never been to the beach? Hime too, so there actually are people like that?

"You should try coming too. If it's just one person, I could just ask Saeko-san. And it'd probably be no problem."

Kaoru smiled wryly and waved his hand back and forth.

"I told you about it before, right? I can't be under the sun. If I'm on the beach at the height of summer, it'll be pretty bad."

"Oh, right, I'm sorry."

"Don't worry about it, your kind thoughts are enough— If it weren't for my body, I would for sure be the first one to tag along."

"...Yeah."

I had always felt that his choice of words had a strange feeling.

"Just for a little bit, let me take you up on your offer…"

Kaoru shifted slightly towards the side, nestled against my side with his shoulders close to mine.

He leaned his head on my shoulder, his face looked just a little like that of a regular girl.

His hair had a very nice smell, somehow it felt kind of strange.

"W-What are you doing all of a sudden? What's wrong?"

Kaoru smiled and laughed, 'Ehehe~'.

"Even if it's a little, let me take a summer training camp, okay?"

"…O-Okay..."

Kaoru sometimes did puzzling things like these, but it wasn't something worth worrying about.

On the other hand, Fuyuumi who sat opposite to us looked as if she was in a flaming enraged state . The straw she held in her mouth went 'Poof—!' as her cheek inflated.

"What's with this! You two are having your fun as you set me aside like a bystander!"

"Sorry, sorry, A-chan. Don't worry, I won't take away Eita, okay?"

Kaoru smiled and returned to his original position, and that was the end of the 'summer training'.

At this moment, the cell phone that Fuyuumi had put on the table sounded with a melody. It looked like it was a text message.

"Who sent it?"

"Hime-chan. We've been texting each other recently."

Fuyuumi said as she replied, swiftly manipulating the phone her fingers. I felt like I needed to congratulate her. Girls could text really fast.

"What type of things do you guys talk about?"

"Of course it was a love consultation. After all, I'm her master."

Fuyuumi rather proudly arched her shoulders.

"Don't infect her with ideas too weird! Hime's not like you guys, she's very pure."

"I-I'm also very pure! How rude!"

As Kaoru finished his parfait, he used a napkin to wipe his mouth and said:

"But it's quite strange. Having Eita's ex-girlfriend Akishino-san running for advice to the fiancée A-chan."

"Indeed."

Generally speaking, this was something unimaginable. It was quite an interesting scene.

"——Rather, how come? Have I told Kaoru about the 'ex-girlfriend' thing before?"

"I heard A-chan mention it. When I heard about your girlfriend from a previous life, my eyes narrowed."

So the news had been leaked.

After Fuyuumi had finished writing back, she put down her phone.

"It certainly wasn't something about girlfriends from the past lives—— What I do is basically teaching her methods of love, for the sake of changing Hime-chan into an ordinary girl."

"Yeah."

As a 'weirdo' at school and shy of crowds, Hime had been trying to change bit by bit after she had joined the club. I also wanted to help her if I could.

Kaoru tilted his head and said:

"But is that okay with you, A-chan? Won't she become a powerful rival contending for Eita like this?"

"No problem, there's no reason to worry about that."

The disciplinary committee member's confidence.

I was afraid to ask, but...

"Why are you so sure?"

"It's very simple————"

Fuyuumi smiled, revealing her white teeth.

"If Hime-chan becomes an ordinary girl, she wouldn't have any reason to like Ta-kun!"

"[...]"

What kind of expression am I supposed to make now?

Should I get angry?

Or should I smile wryly and add 'of course—'?

"Hahaha, of course—"

"Kaoru, why are you smiling?!"

Originally I was going to… I was going to what?

No, when I was in middle school, I had been like that.

But ever since I've been going to high school, I've been very rule-abiding, very ordinary, very serious, very… ordinary…

I suddenly felt very discouraged, and Fuyuumi patted my shoulder.

"The only person who can take care of Ta-kun is me. Before you get dumped by the other three, wouldn't it be better to just stamp it now?"

"WHO. WOULD. STAMP. THAT. YOU. BOKEEEEEEEEEEEEEE—?!"

My hoarse shout echoed throughout the family restaurant.

When I was together with A-chan, the shouting just never stopped!

#5: The Elated Training on the Night Before is Mayhem

#5 合宿前夜のワクワクは修羅場

After that, several days passed and it was finally the night before summer training camp.

Having said that, nothing particularly unusual had happened. Like always, after I took care of the house chores, I started my daily study until the time to call it a day is here. Right now I'm going to review the exercises from the first part of the year content of cram school class.

After staring at the mathematics textbook for an hour, my cellphone rang with the national hymn of some in game country which dubs as an RPG opening theme.

It was a text from Hime.

[From] burningprinprincess@xxxx.mail.ne.jp

[Subject] Sea

[Text] Will Eita bring a swimming ring?

"Hahaha."

Somehow, it made me smile.

I could almost see the excited look on Hime's face the day before the trip.

While I was laughing, another text came.

[Subject] SIA

[Text] Should I bring glasses?

[18]

"Is her eyesight bad?"

......Ah, no, she must mean goggles.

But it's true that seawater will sting the eyes, so it's probably better if she brings it.

I was about to reply, but just when I put my finger on the keys, another text came.

`[Subject] OCIAN`

`[Text] Should I bring Yakisoba?`

"Why would you need Yakisoba!?"

You could probably stuff it into a bento, but it wouldn't taste good after it cooled down.

I pondered a little bit — and I finally understood! She was referring to the yakisoba sold at stands at the seaside. That dish is such a common thing, I didn't know how it would taste any different at the beach.

It seemed like Hime was thinking about「typical beach accessories」when she wrote all that.

I was in the middle of typing that she could buy it there, so there was no reason to bring it, before another new message came.

`[Subject] MARIN`

`[Text] Should I bring the Holy Lance Trident?`

Ah, there was finally something「like」her.

A chuunibyou-chuunibyou feeling, a Hime-Hime feeling.

The so-called trident is the one that's said to be used by Poseidon of Greek mythology. In the world of RPGs, this usually was a legendary weapon.

If you had one, you might as well bring it. I really wanted to see it — I was in the middle of writing this when another text came.

`[Subject] night`

`[Text] Are you going to bring contraceptives?`

"..............................."

I nearly broke my fingers, as I violently typed a reply.

`[Subject] RE: night`

`[Text] I definitely — won't bring one!`

After I sent it, I immediately received a reply.

`[Subject] Cruel`

`[Text] The man is supposed to handle that, was said on the anonymous`

"T-that Hime......"

Knowledge from the net, is just unrealistic jabber.

On This point I have to absolutely lecture her about.

`[Subject] RE: Cruel`

`[Text] Don't believe what anonymous posters wrote!`

After about five minutes, the reply came:

`[Subject] NO PLOBREM`

`[Text] He said he was the company president of the Internet`

"Y-you've been tricked—!"

This wasn't working. It couldn't be solved like this.

I called Hime and spent almost an hour trying to explain there was no need to bring「contraceptives」, and that she shouldn't blindly believe what was written on the Internet.

I only realized after I asked, but Hime didn't seem to understand what a「contraceptive」was. I ended up using an abstract analogy with storks and cabbage patch vocabulary to explain. Afterwards, even through it was the phone, I could see Hime sink shyly into silence.[19]

Ah — this really was 'like Hime' style.

Although she once climbed naked into my bed sheets in a very radical move———— I've always felt as if she didn't understand what「that」meant. Among today's high school girls, she could be considered one of those rarely encountered innocent girls.

I hung up the phone and looked at my watch, and it was already eleven o'clock.

I was preparing the use the remaining hour to memorize key dates in Japanese history, when a「pah」sound came from the room's window as if something had hit it.

"*That one ......*"

I got up and opened the curtains and windows, and faced the girl from the window next door and shouted:

"Hey Chiwa, don't throw erasers! You'll break the window."

"BABOOOOO"

"Because when I called your phone, your line was busy—"

With her hair down and dressed in pajamas, Chiwa smiled and gave out a「ehehe」. Probably because she just showered, her cheeks were still rather warmly pink.

"Then you should just press the doorbell to my house."

"That's so troublesome!"

This girl was like this from long ago too. Because she found going down the stairs troublesome, she would leap across the window spaces like a monkey and come to my room.

"So then, what's up?"

Chiwa immediately took out a white paper bag with a「Janっ」:

"This is a new swimsuit! At lunch today, I went with Mei-chan and the rest to buy it!"

"Tchi, damn bourgeoises."

The swimming suit I'm going to bring, was bought during my first year of middle school.

"We can enjoy ourselves at the beach! Like split open a watermelon, set off fireworks! I also want to eat barbecue! I want to roast lots of pork and beef."

Chiwa's spirits were much higher than usual, just like Hime, as if they were floating in tomorrow's sea already.

After a few more moments of ruckus, Chiwa lowered her tone slightly, and said:

"In the end, *it also looks unnatural in other people's eyes*."

"What does?"

"Ei-kun's and Natsukawa's relationship."

I couldn't help but feel my heart jolt.

"W-What do you mean?"

"How should I put it? I guess you guys aren't the same as normal couples."

"What's so different with others? What's so weird?"

Chiwa put her finger on her lips as she thought:

"Ah—I don't know….. it's almost the feeling like its an act? Himecchi and Ai probably have already noticed too, I think?"

"......"

That's really bad, at this rate....

It's just like the talk I had Masuzu pointed out. Starting tomorrow, during summer training camp, we'd let them recognize that we're a real couple as 「boyfriend and girlfriend」.

Chiwa didn't know what I was thinking, and she slapped her chest resolutely and said:

"I will definitely take first place in that miss contest, and then I'll make Natsukawa release you!"

"......Haha, I'll thank you then."

—If.

If Chiwa came in first place, and Saeko-san wanted her to become my 「bride」, then what would happen?

Would I need to break up with Masuzu, and then start going out with Chiwa?

No, Saeko-san was joking. How could such a thing actually happen—

"Ah sorry, Ei-kun, I have a phone call."

I was pulled back to reality by Chiwa's voice.

"W-Well. I also still want to study."

"Tomorrow morning at six, right?"

"Yes, we'll meet at the door."

After confirming the details of where to meet tomorrow, I closed the window.

When I was about to close the window, I heard Chiwa say, 「Hello? Ai?」. Where they already at a point in their relationship that they called each other frequently? Even though they fought so much, I guess Chiwa really could cultivate friendships with anyone.

—My way of thinking was so simple, I only later understood how superficial I was.

By this point, it had long formed around me—

I was tightly besieged in the "fake".

#6: Traveling in a Window Seat is Mayhem

＃6　旅の車窓から修羅場

"It's definitely not green."

8:02 A.M.; At the departure of the special express train 'Wing Number' this happened to be the first line that was said by Hime.

"No, Hime. Just because the car is referred to as green, it doesn't have to actually be green[20]."

"Is it wrong? Then, what is it?"

"Uh..."

Strange, now that I thought about it, I didn't know either.

"You don't know? Then, as a punishment, can you hold me?"

"No, I don't understand your logic."

"How about a green hold?"

"I don't understand the green on that."

Ah— This was so relaxing, these interactions with Hime that didn't make much sense.

Behind me Masuzu gave a loud 'cough' and cleared her throat.

"Please don't stand in the entrance. You're blocking the passengers behind us."

"Oh, sorry."

I poked at Hime's back to urge her forward, and then followed behind her. Our seats were in the innermost compartment of the carriage number eight.

"The inside of the green car is really empty, perhaps this car was reserved for us?"

"There are still a lot of people lined up on the platform—"

Said Masuzu, Fuyuumi and Chiwa who looked back outside the car.

Even though this was my first time taking a green car, I never expected it to be this empty.

I really had to thank Saeko-san later. She said, 'everything will be a company expenditure', so she handled the booking of our five tickets.

And because she had a shift today, she arranged to meet us on the spot tomorrow by noon.

The train was expected to arrive at Funase station at 9:05 A.M., and for a party of four women and one man, there were still a few minutes before departure.

So—

Our seats were in the last row, A to E. Counting in order from the window, there were three seats, A, B, and C. Across that were two seats, D and E. All the other rows were two-seaters, and only the last row was designed for groups of five members.

As expected of Saeko-san, she had considered our number while booking tickets.

"—So, who will be sitting next to Ei-kun?"

Chiwa fired the first shot and thus opened the game to fight over the seats.

"Why don't we just sit according to what's printed on the ticket?"

Incidentally, I got the ticket for seat D, and the person sitting next to me who had the ticket for seat E was Masuzu.

"But wouldn't it be boring that way?"

When Chiwa made that remark, Fuyuumi and Hime unanimously agreed, 'Yeah—'. *What's with these girls? They are in total synchro.*

Masuzu tilted her head with an 'Eh?'.

"I so happen to be his girlfriend. Isn't it obvious that we'll take human relationships into account when assigning the seats?"

"There's no such thing. My house is next door to his, so I'm equally qualified."

"In my past life, we were also neighbors, so I'm also eligible."

Well, there's nothing to say about Chiwa, but this is the first time I hear this setting from Hime. This is definitely something she just made up!

"I sat next to him in Star Class in kindergarten, so I'm also qualified."

Fuyuumi casually added. Was what she said true? I honestly couldn't remember anything about it.

"Hey, forget whether it's a matter of where you live, or past lives, or Star Class, I don't think this has anything to do with train seats."

The three of them turned a deaf ear to my complaints, and all of them placed their glares on Masuzu.

Amazingly, this situation seemed to be Masuzu VS. the rest of the world. Why was it like that? If they wanted to fight over the seats, shouldn't it be a battle royale?

Because I couldn't just let them stand there, I took all the tickets, shuffled them, and had the four of them draw the tickets like cards.

In order from the A seat, Fuyuumi, Hime, Chiwa —

"In the end,*I* am justice."

Masuzu drew the E seat next to mine, and she held the ticket with an air of victory and pride. In contrast, the other three had a displeased look on their faces.

Things that are meant to be, seemed to just turn out the same.

If we take our objective of demonstrating the 'boyfriend and girlfriend relationship' into account, Masuzu sitting next to me was a great result.

I communicated to Masuzu after we sat down with a few glances.

——Do you understand? Eita.

——Leave it to me, I'll make these lovestruck people feel inferior.

With maximum power output, I put on a shining smile.

"Hey, honey. Let me help you to get your luggage up on the rack—"

"Thank you very much♪ You're always so sweet to me."

"This is the least I can do for you—"

Even though it felt a little bit like a forced dialogue in a script, I had to dance to the tunes of being her boyfriend.

"Eita-kun, after we arrive, want to go for a walk on the beach?"

"Sure— And then let's watch the sunset together afterwards— That's just like something lovers would do—"

"Fufufu, that's a given, right? After all, we *are* a lovers."

"Yeah, that's right— Hahahaha—"

As if it wanted to overlap with the laughter, the bell tone of the train sounded.

The car swayed slightly and began to travel forward.

At this moment—

"Kya— I-It's shaking—♪"

Across the aisle, Chiwa slid into my knees like a landslide as if her body was wildly thrown.

"Sorry! Ei-kun, I was thrown a little out of balance!"

"O-Oh, are you okay?"

I helped the 'hehehe' laughing Chiwa back to her seat.

Did, at any point, the car shake so dramatically that it would cause people to fall *from their seats?*

I revived the mood that was going on and turned back to Masuzu.

"If not that, then we could go to the beach and look for shells. That's also very romantic. If you happen to find a pink shell, then I'll have a little present for you—"

"Kya— the earth is shaking~"

This time it was Hime.

Hime swayed back and forth like a willow tree and snuggled against me, hugging my neck.

Why did she change seats with Chiwa?

"What's wrong, Hime? Did something happen?"

"Mother Earth was wounded by the Evil Dragon Clan's attack, so why don't you hold me?"

I refuse!

"That being said, the car isn't actually shaking much. Aren't we traveling quite smoothly?"

"I disagree. The Evil Dragon Clan's Darkness Green Technique is crushing the earth's vibrations. My sensors have detected this."

"Aaah— Enough, I get it!"

I tore the hugging Hime off of me and returned her to her seat like Chiwa earlier.

Masuzu could not help but frown.

"Just what kind of ruckus have they been making for a while?"

"I want to know that too!"

At this point, I sensed 'something' moving.

I immediately turned around, and was surprised to find Fuyuumi had already shifted to where Hime was sitting earlier. Even though she was casually looking away, her body was slightly leaning towards my side.

"Hey, why did you change your seat?"

"Because Hime-chan said she wanted to check the view from the window."

Even though she replied like this, she didn't look me in the eyes.

"I see…"

I can see it, the plan of these girls.

I originally thought Fuyuumi's and Chiwa's relationships were incompatible as fire and water, but actually they had reached a consensus thanks to the point of being 'anti-Masuzu'... They even got Hime caught up in it.

So, last night when she was on the phone with Chiwa, it turned out they were actually planning a detailed how to 'split' battle plan.

How could I have anticipated an event like this?!

"[...]"

"[...]"

Gloomy silence muddled between us.

I stared intently at the side of Fuyuumi's face and continued to use my eyes in order to pin down this girl's 'shaking'.

"…Kya—"

"Nothing. Is. Shaking."

"Kya—"

"I'm telling you that NOTHING. IS. SHAKING. HN—!"

Please lend me strength, Yamamoto-kun! HNNN—!

"It's definitely *not* 'not shaking'! It's really shaking a lot!"

Fuyuumi pointed to her two companions.

Chiwa and Hime cried, 'iiiiiiit's shakiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiing!', as they shook at high frequency in their own seats… It was more accurate to call it trembling. What was this? Did they activate their vibration mode?

At this moment, the train actually shook a little.

Because I was staring at Fuyuumi, she used all her strength to prevent herself from falling over, but it turned out Masuzu next to me took the opportunity to lean against my shoulder.

"Are you okay, Masuzu?"

"I'm fine, it's all thanks to Eita-kun stopping me with an embrace."

Masuzu's sweet smile was three times cuter than usual.

On the other hand, the vibration mode trio started fighting amongst themselves almost immediately.

"Hey, Ai! What are you staring at? That was obviously a good chance!"

"Master, I was wrong about you. You should have struck more deeply."

"I-It can't be helped! It was too sudden! And I was opposed to this plan from the very start!"

"Eh— How can you say that?!"

It looked like the alliance between my childhood friend, ex-girlfriend, and fiancée was actually quite fragile.

◆

After all the commotion calmed down, it finally felt like we could hold a normal conversation.

Chiwa and the others had apparently given up on 'internal infighting'. Hime played on her handheld device, Chiwa was eating mouthfuls of snacks, and Fuyuumi was reading. Each of them were doing their favorite thing.

Even though I was deliberately acting intimate with Masuzu— After ten minutes, it seemed like we didn't have anything to talk about.

In fact, we rarely had common topics.

The only interest we share in common was 'JoJo's Bizarre Adventures'. But even if we talked about JoJo, we couldn't act as if we were madly in love. Masuzu was overzealous about it, it's enough for her to see road roller[21] and get emotionally excited about it, or she'll do deep analysis on how the most powerful stand in Part IV was actually HARVEST[22], and stuff like that. No matter how you looked at it, it wasn't dialogue befitting a loving couple.

"By the way…"

Maybe because she sensed that I felt disturbed from having nothing to talk about, Masuzu took the initiative instead.

"Recently, I saw 'Magure Punishment Extreme'. "

"Eeh, for real?!"

This really made me happy! She even said she was 'not interested' and 'didn't care' before.

"Even though I didn't really watch it on TV, but since it's the TV drama that Eita likes, I thought I'd take a look at it."

"Are you really interested in knowing my preferences? I'm really fortunate to be your boyfriend!"

Perhaps aware that we were talking very animatedly, Chiwa and the rest looked at us with wet eyes. *Awesome, it's going pretty well, so lets keep up with this!*

"But, if you start from the middle, won't the plot be difficult to understand?"

"Yeah, so I went to the rental store to get it. However, since the television version was all taken out, I rented the film version instead.

"...Hu-oh~"

I smiled wryly. Instead of seeing nothing, she ended up seeing that—

"What? What do you mean by 'Hu-oh~'?"

"Well, when we're talking about the film version..."

Okay.

To the heart of this, 'Maguke' beginner, Masuzu, I, the pro. boyfriend, will carefully explain everything!

"I think whenever a TV series is adapted into a film, there are always some subtle differences. But in the case of Maguke, it's really bad. It's not only subtle, it's extremely *bad*. The strong points of the TV drama were completely sacrificed. First of all, the scripting was a mistake, because it failed to describe real people. 'Maguke's' theme is ' why would a person commit a crime', but the motive of the criminal in the movie is only that he 'wanted money'! Thus, he attacked banks one after another. You get a lot more actions scenes, right? It might have looked really good on the big screens in a cinema, but were Maguke fans really hoping for this? It should be that he wanted money, rather it should have been *why* he wanted the money, right? For example, in order to pay for the surgery costs of his sick mother, or because loan sharks abducted his girlfriend, or maybe because in order to keep a company afloat, they used counterfeit checks in order to prevent their employees and family members from living on the streets, you get the idea. If you don't show these motives, what are they doing?! I thought they were describe these things things in the conclusion, so I had the patience to watch the entire thing, but who expected that the criminal would be hit and fall into the sea! And then it ended! I couldn't keep watching! I really couldn't bear it. The other bad thing about the film version is the boss, since he was a hot guy wearing glasses and came from the hall. Yeah, why did they have to deviate from the TV version here? They said it was due to the schedule being inconvenient for the actor, but you can't just change them— A local police force and a calm trained elite, these core values opposing each other are the charm of 'Maguke'. They simply didn't understand. And another point, even though this is a small matter, but the actor who sang the opening theme was actually Johnny's actor. What's with that? What were they doing? Well, I know that the movie has to attract viewers, I understand that, but 'Maguke' isn't the kind of drama that's targeted at female high school students. So in order to attract that customer base, they would let Johnny sing, I understand that too. But even if I get it... Aargh, I can't stand it! 'Maguke's' theme should be something deep and richly sung by some uncle voice! No, even if you remove the vocals itself, it doesn't matter if it were just an instrumental. With 'Maguke' being this kind of shadowy narrative story, there's no reason to use some kind of frilly song. Giggling and dancing while singing, 'I want to hold your eyes', ~~stupid, right? If it was for the purpose of doing business at the cost of undermining the fans of 'Maguke', we'd really get angry. And if we actually got angry, the feeling will be like, hello there—? Ahh, no matter how I say it, I'd be like a crazy Afghani (laughs). I'm absolutely not like that, I just want to be an ordinary fan, that's all… (wry smile). Whatever, I might as well just support this film a little, as a fan of the series. This film does have things worth seeing. The film was made after the first season ended, but it included actors that later appeared in the second and third season. Did you notice? Did you? Well, you did see it for the first time, so it might have been hard to notice, so you can just leave it to experts like me to explain. First, the actress for the bank attendant whom the gun was pointed at during the robbery. She ended up appearing as the criminal during the second seasons' three words. She's the only actress who has played both, a victim and a criminal, in the same series! That's a small piece of trivia (laughs). There's also the background music when the main character loses the hostage. It's really good, right? It's really captivating. The song eventually became the theme song of the second season of 'Maguke'! It's a really good piece of music, both deep and vigorous. That song actually appeared for the first time in the film, and this is often an exam question (laughs). There's also—"

"Errr? Masuzu?"

When I realized it, I finally noticed Masuzu was actually staring out the window with a blank stare.

She was reading this:

"Tanaka construction company, Hanamaru's meat, Minato timber plant—"

"Hey...?"

"#132 county road, winner's turn, lunch for ¥590, earn back what's been paid too much for, Kutsurogi's inn GRAND OPENING."

I finally noticed.

"Y-You've been reading the signs that we pass?"

Was... Was my topic really that boring?

"M-Masuzu-san? Were you really not interested in what I was just talking about?"

"We also buy broken bikes, GOGO'S root mound shop, HEAVEN ELEVEN, language hall bookstore."

"Sorry! I accidentally got carried away! I apologize. Please forgive me!"

I bowed my head, but Masuzu only continued to read signs.

"Irrelevant knowledge food (Ltd), DANNY'S irrelevant knowledge shop, irrelevant knowledge the workers—"

"N-No! My knowledge is not irrelevant!"

Pretending to read signs to make fun of her boyfriend, this was really advanced for a poisonous tongue!

"Swiss Bank Tax Branch irrelevant, irrelevant sushi, irrelevant clinic, irrelevant sea ————————the sea."

"Huh?"

"The sea, it's here."

I quickly lifted my head and found that the view Masuzu was gazing upon was—

"Ooooooh, it's here! It's the sea——————!"

I couldn't help but cheer.

The bright blue sky, the sunlight that was being reflected and thus shined off the waves, and the beach blooming with all sorts of colorful umbrellas. This scene unfolded behind the window before us.

"Wow, awesome—! So beautiful—!"

"Fufun, it doesn't look bad at all."

Chiwa and Fuyuumi leaned over, expressing excitement as they surveyed the sea.

But since Hime was asleep holding her handheld game—

"Hey, Hime, get up! It's the sea!"

I shook her shoulders, and Hime opened her eyes with a pop.

"Sea? Where?"

"Not on the window on that side, on this side, this side."

I changed seats with Hime, and she immediately stared out the window, her body stiff.

Her widened eyes seemed to dazzle and shine.

"How is it, your first time seeing the sea?"

Hime didn't take her gaze off the window, but with a voice loud and clear, she said:

"I want to compress it with ZIP!"

#7: Enjoying the Flavor of the Seaside is Mayhem

#7 海を満喫する修羅場

The resort facility that Saeko-san had referred us to had a detached building on the high ground which faced the beach. It was a compact and elegant two-story building, with a brand new facade and very clean interior. It looked like it was a cozy place to spend three days at.

After obtaining the key from the hotel manager and listening to all kinds of relevant information, we sat down on the living room sofa to discuss the next activities on our schedule.

"Huh? Of course we're going swimming, right?"

Chiwa said as she started doing stretching exercises on the spot.

"I'm already wearing a swimsuit underneath my clothes."

"Are you an elementary school student?"

Chiwa looked as if she was ready to take off her clothes and rush to the beach, after all, she really liked to swim.

"We didn't come here to swim. We're here for club activities."

Masuzu thus said, using a demeanor befitting of a club president.

"Since you have the free time to splash about in salt water, we might as well turn this into a 'popucute' practice for monopolizing all the attention on the beach.

"That's because Natsukawa can't swim, right?"

"No, I can swim, but *I* don't need to hide a flat loli-body underwater, unlike a certain *someone*."

"Who's got a loli-body?!"

Like usual, I tried to appease them with 'Okay, okay' and said:

"Hime, what do you want to do?"

"I want to make a one-thousandth scale model of the castle, 'Anastasia', that I lived in in my past life."

In short, she wanted to play in the sand. Well, that really was a classic.

"And Fuyuumi?"

"How about picking up sea shells? Isn't that quite suited for maidens?"

"Oh, that's a good one."

Since I was in a rush to head out in the morning and didn't have breakfast, I was very hungry at the moment. I really wanted to eat clams, shellfish, and things like that.

"Then what does Ei-kun want to do?"

"Eh? Me, I... I want to split a watermelon."

Rather, I didn't so much want to split a watermelon. I rather really wanted to eat one.

Masuzu clapped her hands and said:

"Then let's do everything."

"Ha?"

"Because, it's *popucute* sea bathing, *popucute* playing in the sand, *popucute* picking shells, and *popucute* watermelon splitting. It's fine if we just do all of those."

"There's no reason to put "popucute" in front of each one."

How could one become popular by splitting a watermelon? Are we going to give slices away free of charge after splitting it?

"We can also consider these activities to be a special training for the beauty contest. Even though it's already a fact that I'm going to place first, I still want everyone else to get decent places, too."

Masuzu gave a provocative smile and the expressions of the other three changed.

"Then let's do it! I'll show you why my swimming style is called 'The Chihuahua that dropped into the water'!"

Chiwa, I don't think that phrase has anything to do with praising.

"'Anastasia' is no ordinary castle. It's a fighting fortress equipped with a spirit magic engine. Apart from the main cannon, 'Salamander's Thunder', it is equipped with 255 magic cannons, and possesses enough firepower to destroy Mars ten times over."

Hime, even if it can destroy Mars ten or even a hundreds times, unpopular things will stay unpopular.

"While the sea breeze is sweeping my hair and I delicately hold a cherry-colored shell next to my ear… Let me show you who is the best suited in the mannerisms of a maiden."

Forget about that, Fuyuumi. If you find any clams, you can bring them back to the hotel to make miso soup. Or we could use wine to steam it.

—Of course, if I would have happened to throw a tsukkomi here, it would have been totally and utterly ignored.

After everyone returned to their rooms to change, we borrowed an entire set of beach equipment from the beachside clubhouse before we headed to the beach.

When we had originally walked from the station, I had never noticed the strong scent of the beach. Hot sand pushed in through the cracks of my sandals. A flood of FM radio sounds poured from the beachside clubhouse along with the sound of waves leaping and people swimming and playing in the water. All together formed a unique palette of noise that struck my naked upper body.

The sea.

The genuine sea.

What's with this? for some reason the excitement is running really high!

"IT'S——————THE———————SEA!"

Next to the place where Masuzu and I set up the parasol and the beach chair, Chiwa suddenly pulled Hime's hand and rushed with her towards the sea.

"Wait a minute, you should warm up first!"

—Even despite Fuyuumi's stern screams, everything just flew into one ear and out the other.

"Ch-Chihuahua, isn't it really scary? Isn't it?"

"Hahahaha, don't be afraid, don't be afraid! Let's go! One, two, three, jump!"

Chiwa fearlessly faced the incoming wave and even submerged in the water via diving. As she was still holding onto Hime's hand, she was forced to follow, and the two of them stirred up huge waves after they slid into the sea.

"Yay—♪ This feels great—!"

"I have finally conquered the seven seas...!"

Chiwa's innocent laughter and the witch-like 'Fufufu' laugh of Hime overlapped.

I was stunned.

"Are they children?"

"Seriously. There's no way for them to be popular."

Masuzu hugged her knees as she sat under the parasol, I could feel a 'yare, yare'.

"And? Are you really not going to swim?"

"…To say such malicious things. Do you think that it will be forgiven just because it's Eita-kun?"

Hey, she's angry. She's actually really concerned about the 'not being able to swim' thing.

On the other hand, it looked like Fuyuumi had immediately begun to pick up shells. After having brushed aside her smooth and supple hair, she knelt down and stared at the white sand. That appearance was actually quite good and it might make her quite popular.

"How is it? Are there any clams? Any shellfish?"

"Sorry, I'm not digging for clams... Ah!"

Fuyuumi lifted a tiny white shell and happily handed it to me.

"Hey, Kidou-kun, don't you think the shape of that one is like a heart?"

"Really? I feel like it looks like fried horse mackerel."

Heck, I was getting more and more hungry.

Also, it was almost noon, so I could probably go to the beachside clubhouse to buy something before it got too crowded.

Fuyuumi's face twitched slightly as she stared at the shell and said:

"T-There has to be another piece that's shaped exactly like this one, somewhere out there. Why don't we look for it together?"

"Look for fried horse mackerel?"

Fuyuumi's shoulders started to tremble and the fried horse mackerel shell clasped within her hands gave a 'crackle' sound.

"I don't care anymore, Ta-kun, you idiot!"

Fuyuumi gave a 'hmph' and turned away, with heavy footsteps she walked into the sea. What made you so angry, A-chan?

"It looks like Fuuyumi-san's 'popucute power' can't match up with Eita's 'thick-head power'."

Masuzu said rather indifferently. Because Chiwa and the rest of them weren't nearby, she had turned into 'cold Masuzu' mode.

"So, what's your 'popucute power'?"

"...It's just as you can see."

I did as Masuzu said and looked around. Even though they were standing rather far away in a circle, there was still a small crowd of people, and the sex ratio appeared to be approximately seven to three, male to female. Most of them were watching Masuzu. Some of them looked enchanted, and others were whispering into their companion's ears.

It looked like the destructive power of silver hair and blue eyes had significant influence even at the sea.

"This ability to catch attention is at the level of a koala in a zoo."

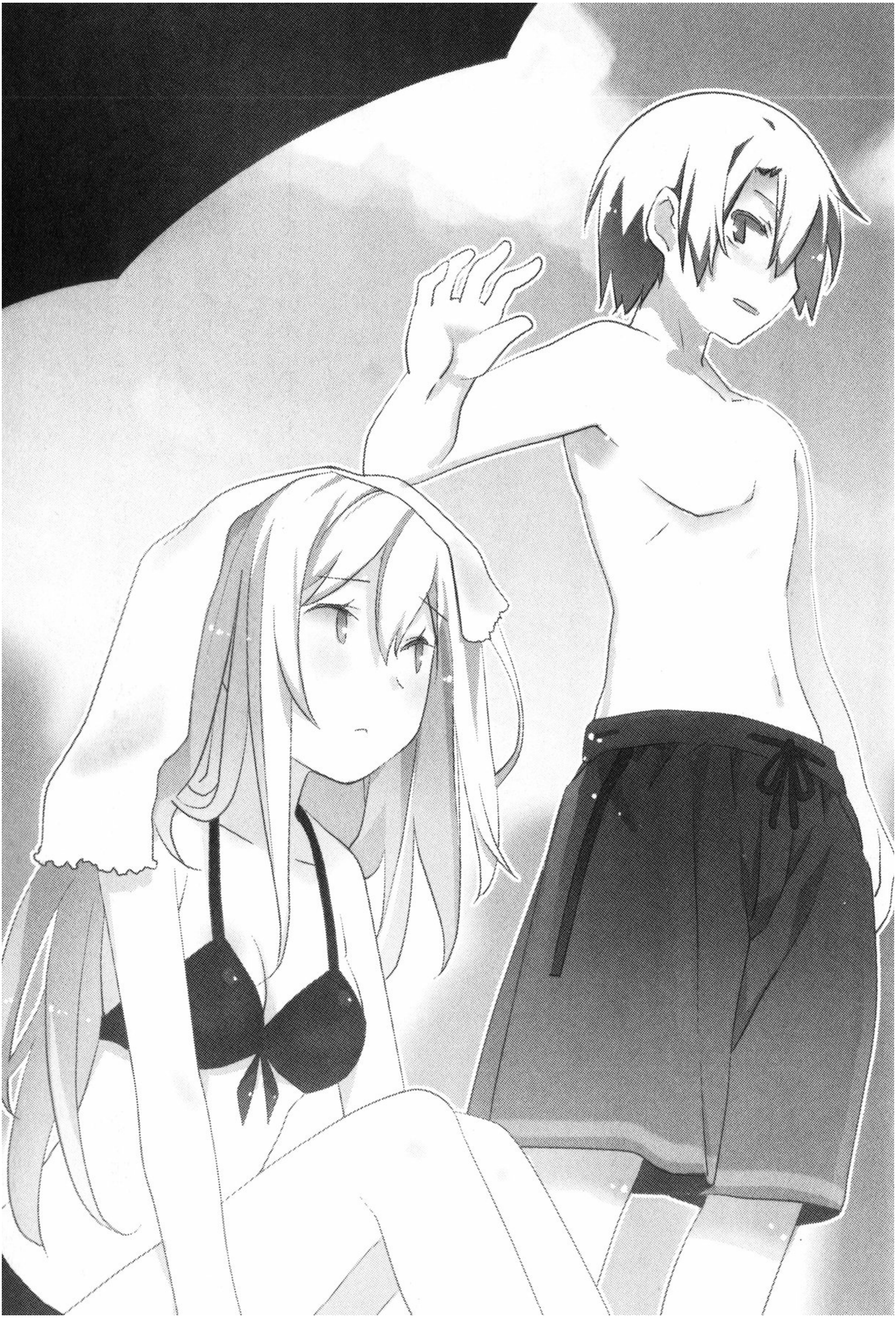
"Hmph, who's a koala biscuit[23]?"

"I didn't say that! Don't tell me you're filled with chocolate on the inside?"

Masuzu twisted as she held her knees, as if she wanted to hide her body. Even though she should've been accustomed to being looked at, it must have been uncomfortable to be treated as a 'showpiece'.

I took a towel from my bag, and covered Masuzu with it.

From around me, I heard something from the men that sounded like sighs, 'don't do unnecessary things', but I played dumb and ignored it.



Masuzu's eyes stared at me sharply.

"You're acting lovestruck. What's the meaning of this?"

"Well, we are here on this boarding trip to demonstrate to Chiwa and the rest that we really *are* 'boyfriend and girlfriend', right?"

Masuzu pouted and wrapped the towel around herself:

"...Then, I'll thank you first."

"Hooo."

"But those three weren't looking this way *at all*."

I looked in the direction Masuzu pointed, and those three were certainly not paying attention to anyone else.

Chiwa was shouting, 'Yahhh—!', as she was swimming towards a rock with a long pine tree growing on it. Hime and Fuyuumi were unceasingly piling up sand. The battle fortress 'Anastasia' seemed to be quite a big thing, as the amount of sand piled up for the foundation was quite amazing. Though, it didn't look as if it could destroy Mars. But it was at least enough to make their muscles quite sore tomorrow.

"Everyone's enjoying themselves."

Even though I didn't know what was being popucute about it.

—Whatever, it was still quite peaceful!

◆

After playing for about an hour, it was time to eat lunch.

At the beachside clubhouse, we bought five portions of fried noodles and lemon soda, and then ate under the beach parasols.

"Tastes incredible."

Hime said immediately after taking a bite of noodles.

"Well the taste itself is so-so, the sauce is only salty without flavor, and most of all there's still the taste of flour— But what's incredible is that it still makes you want to eat more and more."

Apart from her Chuunibyou talk, Hime rarely spoke much, so it was surprising that she paid that much attention to the taste.

"No matter what you eat at the beach, it's all delicious—"

Chiwa had long ago emptied the food in her container and was currently slurping the lemonade. *You should clean off the pieces of seaweed that are still stuck to your cheek. Like this, you're pretty far from becoming popucute.*

"The reason why the taste is so heavy is probably due to peeping up people who are tired from swimming, I wonder if they thought about it like that."

As if she were eating pasta, Fuyuumi rolled up little pieces of noodle around her chopsticks and placed them in her mouth. It was quite a unique way to eat them.

With regards to Masuzu, who normally didn't eat very much, she was almost finished with eating the fried noodles at the seaside. It was a really good thing, because I was getting worried whether this girl ever had a proper meal or not.

After waiting for Hime, who ate the slowest, Masuzu opened her mouth and said:

"Eita-kun, could you please prepare the dessert."

"Ha?"

"Wasn't it your suggestion after all? Here."

Masuzu pointed to a watermelon which had been bought from the beachside clubhouse (I had been forced to pay).

It looked like she wanted me to 'split it'!

"Good luck, Ei-kun! You have to hit it popucute-ly!"

"With Eita's popucute-ly smooth swordsmanship, this should be easy."

"As a popucute disciplinary committee member, I will help score your splitting of the watermelon with good intentions only!"

Ahhhh, just drop the 'popucute, popucute' already!

I was asked to sit with my back to the watermelon, as Masuzu used a towel to blindfold me.

"Oh, where's the stick?"

"We don't have such a thing."

"How am I supposed to split it without it?!"

"For that, please just use your head."

"So I need to figure out a good way of splitting it myself?"

"Yeah. Just handle it easily by ruthlessly banging your head onto it."

"That's quite the physical interpretation!"

Masuzu ignored my protests and declared, 'now begin!'.

For the time being I stood up and took the first step, but— N-Now, what was I supposed to do?

At this time, there was a clap from the right.

"Heeeey, Ei-kun, this way, this way♪"

It was Chiwa's voice, so I started walking towards the right.

Then a voice came from the left:

"No, Eita, that way is to the underworld. Come to my side!"

Thus, Hime let out a cute voice and I corrected my path towards the left.

This time, a voice came diagonally right behind me:

"Kidou-kun, this way! You'll never go wrong listening to a disciplinary committee member!"

Hence, after Fuyuumi said that, I shifted my path towards her direction.

But from behind me, Masuzu's voice came.

"Everyone's trying to trick you! I'm the only one who's telling the truth!"

How could it be behind me? I changed direction, and the three of them protested simultaneously:

"Natsukawa is the only one you definitely can't listen to!"

"The president is a dark demon god… A chaos demon king… Devil general…"

"You have to be careful, these women will corrupt you!"

And so the three of them said in unison, 'Don't trust Masuzu'.

—Well, what am I supposed to do?

In the past, it hasn't turned out well when I was ordered around by Masuzu.

The possibility of getting burned this time is also very *high.*

But in this situation, how could a 'boyfriend' not believe in his 'girlfriend'?

Then I'll take the chance and throw myself into the frying pan!

In Masuzu's direction, I forcefully stamped on the sand and approached step by step, as for the noises that came behind me from Chiwa and the club, I didn't put any attention to it.

"Masuzu, where's the watermelon?"

"From your position, five meters straight forward, and then please jump and catch it."

"...Can I trust you?"

"Of course, something *wonderful* will happen."

Then I'll strengthen my resolve.

I moved to the point where Masuzu indicated, lowered my stance, and then jumped forward.

momyu[24]

—Huh?

My face seemed to have hit something.

This isn't a watermelon, right? I doubt that there is a watermelon that is this round?

It was rather springy, and my fingers seemed to fit over it just right. Also, there was this indescribable wonderful fragrance.

Furthermore, there were two watermelons, gently enveloping my cheek.

"How is it, Eita-kun? Aren't these watermelons… *delicious*?"

Masuzu spoke as if she were trying to hold back her laugh, her voice tingled my ears.

Hmph.

I understand the punchline.

I never expected she would use such an old-fashioned tactic.

Many would think of this as 'something wonderful'.

It does *feel incredibly good.*

"Ei-kun! W-W-W-Whalt are yooouuu doimg?!"

"…You didn't come to hug me..."

"S-S-Shameful—!"

I heard voices full of hatred.

After this, what's waiting for me is hell.

A hell which goes by the name of mayhem.

For that very reason... Might as well just stay a little bit more. Just stay a little bit more like this…

◆

I don't really want to remember what happened afterward.

The disciplinary committee member wrote on my back with an oil pen, 'I am a shameless man', and the entire afternoon I was stuck in the predicament of watching over the bags. I truly felt it was a good thing that I brought by textbook.

Well, at least in terms of trying to demonstrate our relationship as girlfriend and boyfriend to them, it wasn't a bad show... I tried to comfort myself with that.

When I looked in the mirror after I had showered when we had returned to the hotel, I discovered that those words were the only part of my body that wasn't tanned. It looked as if I'd have to spend the rest of the summer carrying the 'shameless' text.

"Hmph! I've been branded with the crime, huh?"

I muttered that like a Chuunibyou warrior, my fingers tracing the words on my back.

Ahh, having said that—

"I just need to rub it a little bit mooooooooooooore!"

#8: Two Women in the Kitchen is Mayhem

#8 女二人のキッチンは修羅場

We decided to make curry for dinner.

The hotel had already prepared potatoes, carrots, onions, and beef beforehand. However, it looked like the people that provided the ingredients couldn't get any beef stew. It was still a clear message of 'if you're in a boarding house, it has to be curry' regardless.

After Fuyuumi rummaged around the kitchen cupboard, she shrugged her shoulders.

"Nope. There are a lot of other seasonings, but there doesn't seem to be any curry roux."

"Seriously, now what?"

"Oh, but there is some sauce for beef stew."

"…It can't be that one of the hotel staff took it with them, right?"

In other words, since the only thing that is lacking is curry roux, we might as well go out and buy some.

"Two people should be enough to buy the groceries. For the sake of fairness, should we decide by rock-paper-scissors?"

Masuzu proposed this.

"Eita-kun should stay behind, though."

"Eh? How come?"

Masuzu pointed at the chandelier hanging from the ceiling of the living room.

"I tried turning on the switch earlier, but it didn't work. Can you find some lightbulbs to replace the broken ones?"

I understand, this falls into the so called 'men's work'.

Fuyuumi readied herself by donning an apron, after which she said:

"I'll stay behind to prepare the curry. You guys can't cook after all, right?"

Chiwa pouted in displeasure.

"Why do you get to decide everything? So unfair!"

"Ara, so you *can* cook, then?"

Chiwa gave a 'salute' with her hand.

"Sorry! I just wanted to try saying that!"

"…Hey, you..."

Thus, aside from Fuyuumi, the three of them played rock-paper-scissors, and Masuzu was the one left behind.

After Chiwa and Hime headed out, I opened the cupboard in the living room and started looking for lightbulbs. Masuzu and Fuyuumi were at the kitchen counter, peeling vegetables.

"Natsukawa-san, is it okay if I ask you something?"

"As long as it's within my ability to answer..."

With my back to them, I listened to their conversation as I looked for a lightbulb in the lowest shelf of the cupboard .

...Ah— It's too dark to see clearly.

Of course it would have been fine if the light was turned on, that's why I was looking for a lightbulb after all.

"Was Natsukawa-san very troubled during April and May? After being confessed to so many times by the students?"

"No. It wasn't troubling at all."

"I happened to see it once, when you were being confessed to behind the gym. Afterwards, you sighed."

I tried to search by hand feeling for a bit——— No, these all had to be cleaning supplies.

I guess I'll look on the shelf above this one.

"Well, that indeed happened. So what about it?"

"I'm sorry, but I also happened to hear something about the confession too, the voices reached even to the flower garden."

"[...]"

"He looked really angry, that male student. I also dislike guys like that who get angry when things don't happen like they want them to."

[...]

I was starting to feel that there was a very severe conversation going on over there.

"If stuff like that kept happening repeatedly, wouldn't anyone start to hate being confessed to? It wouldn't be strange to never even want to date anyone. No matter who it was. "

"…Uh-huh."

"Speaking from that perspective, isn't Kidou-kun a very good choice? He is super serious, he doesn't treat girls roughly, and has the best grades in our grade. If you start dating him, no one would think that it was strange."

"[...] [...] ...Um, Fuyuumi-san?"

"What is it?"

"Just how far should I peel this potato?"

'Ahhh!', this noise resounded from the kitchen.

Fuyuumi held a potato the size of a marble and shouted:

"You just had to peel the skin off! Why did you have to peel it to the core?!"

"Oh, I see. No wonder why it felt like 'don't know where to stop'."

"Enough! Forget about the potatoes. Just go peel the onions!"

"Understood."

Because they started cooking again, I got back to exploring the cupboard.

"So, back to our conversation... Ever since you started dating Kidou-kun, you haven't been confessed to, right?"

"Well, somehow."

"That's obvious, of course. There aren't boys shameless enough to want to approach a girl that already has a boyfriend."

"That's true."

"If that was the reason for which you started dating Kidou-kun——— I may not be able to forgive it."

I couldn't help but turn back and look towards the kitchen, watching the silhouettes of their backs.

Since Masuzu and Fuyuumi were moving their hands unceasingly, I couldn't catch their faces.

What kind of expressions were they having right now?

"I don't really understand why I'm being told this."

"I thought about it, after all. Ever since his oba-san mentioned that the relationship between you two is 'fake'. Then I wondered for what kind of motive you'd do that."

"[...] ...Fuyuumi-san."

"Well? Did I hit a bullseye?"

"Just how far should I peel until I can stop peeling this onion"

Fuyuumi gave a startled cry, 'Naa?!'

She pinched the only tiny onion core that remained.

It was peeled into such a small size that it had a little bit of a cute feeling to it.

"You just had to peel the brown part off! Why did you have to peel it all the way to the core?"

"Hmm. No wonder why it felt like 'don't know where to stop'."

"I've heard that excuse already! Forget it, just go wash the rice! And don't use dish detergent!"

"Pupupu, who'd actually use dish detergent to wash rice?"

"That's because you're don't seem to be able to do anything without taking it to extremes—!"

Fuyuumi stomped so forcefully it seemed like she would break the floor.

Did Masuzu really come out on top?

...No, even so.

Fuyuumi's theory... It certainly is enough to win the jackpot.

As expected from the devilish disciplinary committee member, her performance is nothing like Chiwa's or Hime's.

"Well, what is it? Did my guess hit the nail?"

"If it *is* like you guessed, then what are we going to do?"

"...Wait a minute, why'd you take out a grindstone?"

"Oh, I just wanted to polish each grain of rice with the utmost care."

"Even if you stay up till after nightfall, you won't be able to polish it all! How long do you intend to play the idiot?"

"Aaah, it feels like 'don't know where to stop'. "

"If you don't stop it right now, this gentle Ai-chan is going to get angry soon, so you better knock iiiiiiit————!"

Ah, well, and that had been it.

Probably because she had gotten too tired of yelling, in the end Fuyuumi had been left quietly preparing curry. This could be summed up as Masuzu's, 'silly victory'.

I also had finally found the lightbulb and proceeded to use a folding ladder to install it.

A fragrant smell came from the kitchen accompanied with the sound of cooking, and it was about time that Chiwa and Hime returned.

"In any event, Fuyuumi-san is really good at cooking."

Masuzu lined up five plates along the table.

"Somehow. It's probably because ever since my mom passed away, it's been my responsibility to cook for my father and little brother."

Fuyuumi hummed 'Light brown Vegetable ♪' as she turned off the stove.

"What about Natsukawa-san's family? Do you have any siblings?"

"Well, a little sister."

"Mhm, are you two close in relationship?"

"It's the absolute possible worst."

"[...] …I-I see."

Perhaps because she felt the atmosphere was very unusual, Fuyuumi did not ask any further.

"Well, our family's relationship is pretty good, since it's really hard to make friends after transferring schools so much. It has always come down to me and my brother playing together."

"Playing pretend-doctor?"

"Doctor… No, we only played normal games."

"Aaaah, so it *were* doctor games."

"I'm telling you that it isn't like that!"

If we only look at the way their exchange goes, it just looks like a nice relationship between very good friends from the same club.

However——— What Fuyuumi was saying earlier, had really grabbed my attention.

So, we are really being suspected.

In order for me and Masuzu to burn our 'boyfriend and girlfriend' relationship into their minds, just what did we have to do?

#9: Scheming an Ending is Mayhem

#9 謀略の結末は修羅場

"We've got to make them give up in one go."

Masuzu said from within the bathroom.

"To give up—— What?"

I responded from outside.

After dinner I had been resting in my room when I received a message from Masuzu, 'I have something secret to discuss', so I went 'next to the bathroom window outside the building' as instructed— Masuzu was still inside the bath.

She intended to talk through the bathroom window, that's what it looked like.

Since in this house Chiwa and the others could have their eyes and ears everywhere, this was a suitable place to whisper quietly indeed. However, if anyone discovered us, wouldn't they run to the police right away? After all, it looked like as if I was peeping.

"After that talk with Fuyuumi-san there is one thing that became certain. We are under suspicion, now our only choice is to show them decisive evidence that we are dating."

"Huh? What did you say?"

Masuzu's voice was completely masked by the sound of the shower, I didn't get her there.

"D e c i s i v e - E v i d e n c e!"

"You say evidence, but what kind of?"

"Which shows that we are *dating*."

Even if you go out of your way to say that.

Just what would be good to show that?

"Do you mean stuff like getting pictures at sticker-photo booths during dates, or giving each other presents?"

"That's no bad thinking; but if someone were to look at it too thoroughly, it'd be easy to tell that it's just a fabrication. Even if Harusaki-san and Akishino-san are convinced, I doubt that Fuyuumi-san and your oba-sama would be fooled."

"…That'll be hard."

"Furthermore, it's not like they'll quietly wait for us to set that up, right?"

"Ah, right."

Actually, when we just started our 'fake' relationship, a proposal like 'let's take a picture at the photo-stick booth for evidence' had taken us to go to a game center. But just as we walked in front of the machine, we couldn't help but to turn back due to that unbearable 'lovestruck atmosphere'. On the way back, Masuzu muttered continuously, 'die, rot, die, rot, die, rot, die, rot, die, rot', as she kicked a fence along the road. I was stuck in the mayhem between my girlfriend and the national transportation department.

"Then what? Can we even come up with a present that isn't easy to identify as a fabrication?"

"For that reason material objects won't do."

The sound of the water running stopped, and I heard water overflow from the bathtub.

"Just by seeing it, to have those girls completely convinced. We need 'something' intense."

"Intense, is it?"

As our dialogue shifted into a pause, the sound of waves could be heard from the beach.

I looked up at the sky which was filled entirely with stars as it was a new moon. The summer constellations night unfolded itself freely.

Aah, being by the sea is really great!

...But if the conversation wasn't about our fake selves, this would be really an uplifting moment.

"In other words, we need to proceed in a certain manner, right?"

"Please explain."

"How about we enthusiastically talk about arranging dates right in front of them? Things like, the restaurant over here tastes really good, or the scenery over there is really beautiful and the like"

"In order to sound like we *are* together, we'd have to carefully plan in advance. Furthermore, the ability to act very earnestly is necessary. I'm confident in my own acting skills, but—— Eita, do *you* have that confidence?"

"...Not at all."

"Then, rejected."

I couldn't help but look back in the direction of the window.

"And what's with you?! From the beginning, you've been doing nothing but opp—"

Halfway through my sentence, I couldn't help but to lose my voice.

On the other side of the humid glass, Masuzu's bare figure could be distinguished quite vividly.

From her shoulders to her back, and then from her back to her waist. I noticed her body line which was emphasized by the hair stuck to her skin.

Her bottom looked plump but round, the usual image of her in a skirt couldn't possibly hint the existence of this hidden plentifulness.

I was frozen as I got a reminder of the pointed angle that her chest had.

"[...]"

I couldn't do anything but stare.

I couldn't even let out that type of expressions that gal-game protagonists let out in this type of 'lucky pervert' situations.

I who could never understand why anyone would choose nude subjects when it came to paintings… I suddenly had a strong realization. It needed to have an impact like this.

"———So you really can't think of anything..."

Masuzu's voice drew me back to reality.

I quickly pulled my gaze away from the window.

"L-Let me hear what you think."

"'Reppuzan'."

"[...] [...] ...Ha?"

"Can't you remember your very own words that you wrote? I mean a kiss."

Aaaah, that thing— It's from my Chuuni notebook...

—Wait.

"A-A k-kiss?!"

"*Right* in front of Harusaki Chiwa, Akishino Himeka, and Fuyuumi Ai."

"...W-Wait a sec."

"It would be nice if it had a natural feeling. Like, as if it spelled, 'this is just as a warm greeting', as you kiss me."

Masuzu's tone was very flat.

It wasn't her usual poisonous tongue tone, the one that she used to play with my mood.

It was actually quite frightening. This dead serious tone that she carried.

"A-Are you seriously saying that?"

"Ara, do you need to be that surprised? We've done it so many times already."

True.

Masuzu and I have already kissed several times.

However, those were all nothing but surprise attacks.

We've neither ever done it in front of Chiwa and the others, nor did we let them know about it.

"Something like a kiss doesn't mean anything to those being 'anti-love' like us. But to those of 'lovestruck' mentality, it's extremely intense, right? I think that we don't really have any other choice but using that at this point."

"But won't Chiwa and the rest get angry? No, there is no other way but for them to get furious."

"Yes, it'll become a battlefield."

"Think of my circumstances! I'll have to deal with the three of them!"

"...That's true, it's just like you say."

Masuzu's voice echoed.

"So, regarding this matter, I'll give you the right to 'choose'. "

"Choose?"

"I won't use the secret of your notebook as a tool to force you, that's what I mean."

Masuzu declared something even more outrageous than revealing my dark past.

————————To kiss, or not to kiss. You're the one that has to decide, Kidou Eita.

◆

It was about ten o'clock at night.

After eating dinner and taking a bath, I normally studied———— But that couldn't be done at the moment, since the training camp wasn't finished.

We were gathered in the living room playing cards. After playing Five Card Stud[25] (Masuzu won by a landslide) and Sevens[26] (Masuzu also won by a landslide), we were now playing Two Pairs[27].

"Ah... I didn't get it."

I clearly remembered that there had been a three of hearts there, but after turning it over, it turned out to be a seven of spades.

This was already my fifth consecutive mistake, and I hadn't even gotten a single pair yet.

The next turn was Chiwa's, who merely laughed and said:

"Ei-kun is soo weak! The three of hearts is here—!"

She easily took the cards that I had originally set as my goal.

Surprised, Fuyuumi asked:

"Could it be that you are bad at memorizing? Then how did you study for Japanese history then?"

"Ah, no— hahaha..."

I could only laugh.

Ever since earlier, I hadn't been able to remember the cards since I was completely unable to concentrate.

Without even realizing it, I found myself staring at the lips of Masuzu, who was sitting across from me.

"Eita, do you not feel well?"

Next to me, Hime had a worried look on her face as she watched me.

"I-It's nothing—! I'll make a comeback soon!"

Even though I tried to sound as if I had raised my spirits, I honestly thought that this wasn't the time to concentrate on a card game.

My heart wouldn't stop thumping, and I was sweating abnormally. It was almost as if I couldn't mentally do 2+2.

In contrast, Masuzu was very calm, and she didn't look tense at all. It was almost as if she actually enjoyed the game. But she didn't even once try to meet my gaze, which made me a little concerned.

—Later.

Whenever I was ready, I was supposed to say, 'I'm tired. I'm going to bed early', and get ready to leave. At Masuzu's reply, 'Goodnight, darling', that was the signal. I was supposed to whisper softly into her ear, 'Yeah, goodnight honey', and then conveniently place a kiss on her lips—

The fact that I'm narrating this myself doesn't mean that it didn't make me feel uncomfortable!

Where did this American couple come from? Those two aren't Japanese at all!

"You're clutching your head madly. What's wrong?"

Chiwa said with curiosity.

"Could you be sleepy already?"

"O-O-Of course not! Look, I still have so much energy!"

I bent my right arm to show my biceps. Even though I didn't think mental concentration on card games had anything to do with arm strength. But I couldn't think of anything else on the spot to demonstrate my liveliness.

"Really? Well then that's good."

Chiwa said this, but she was still rocking restlessly, as if she couldn't calm herself.

Hime and Fuyuumi had started giving each other glances, but whenever they nearly met my gaze, they averted their eyes. It was as if they couldn't keep calm.

What is it? There is obviously something happening here.

In either case, now wasn't the time to worry about that.

I had to settle my course of action before Chiwa and the rest said 'goodnight'.

What should I do?

I was now faced with the 'pick' that Saeko-san had mentioned before.

The Harem.

The mayhem.

Back then I had answered, 'I refuse either'."

After all, for an 'anti-love' person a harem or a mayhem were both the same. Love was simply a thing to be avoided.

But *right now*, I had no choice but to pick one of those two.

If I kissed Masuzu, then I'd be set on the mayhem route.

If I didn't kiss her—— I would be 'leaning' towards the harem route. Without provoking Chiwa, Hime, or Fuyuumi, I would have to maintain a certain distance from Masuzu.

However, the fake relationship would crumble down.

And after it would crumble down in front of me, what awaited me—— Wasn't it obvious that it'd be nothing but mayhem?

That's why...

Rather than putting this off, I should take action *right now*.

I glanced at my watch, and the time was 10:27:50 P.M.. Chiwa normally went to bed before eleven o'clock, so this were almost dangerous waters.

I'll make my move at 10:28:00 PM.

I'll countdown.

Three.

Two.

One.

"I-I'm tired. I'm going to bed early."

From my mouth came out the code words we agreed to.

Now Masuzu was supposed to say, 'Goodnight, darling'.

"Then I guess we'll leave it here for today."

But Chiwa was the first one to speak.

"Huh? But you don't have to stop just because of me."

"Don't worry. I'm already tired of playing. More importantly, there are some things we want to give you today."

Chiwa took two white paper bags from her tote bag.

"This is for Natsukawa, and this is for Ei-kun."

Masuzu looked puzzled as she received a bag.

I was also puzzled.

"What's in the bag?"

Fuyuumi poked my waist:

"Well, just open and see. Right, Hime-chan?"

After being mentioned, Hime blushed and lowered her head. It looked like this was something the three of them did together.

I did as she said and pulled out the object inside. It turned out to be a rather uniquely designed phone strap.

It looked like the English letter, 'Z'.

"Let me say, first of all. That's not the letter 'Z'. It's actually the '乙' from 'maiden'."

Chiwa held back her smile as she took out an identical cell phone strap from her pocket.

"The five of us have the same one. By the way, they were designed by Himecchi."

"The person who suggested it was Chiwa, and the person who found the store to make them was me."

Fuyuumi and Hime also took out more identical phone straps and showed them to us.

Chiwa laughed and said:

"You see, sports clubs have uniforms or team bags, but why can't the Maiden's Club have something like that? After all, this difficulty we had to become an official club, I felt like we were lacking something, so I discussed it with the other two and came up with this."

"We kept it a secret from Natsukawa-san, since you're the one who worked the hardest to start the club, right? Hime-chan said that we should make this a gift for you, as the club members."

Hime blushed slightly and nodded.

"But why did you keep it a secret even from me?"

"If we told Ei-kun, wouldn't you leak it to Natsukawa? You're absolutely terrible at lying!"

After Chiwa laughed, and of course it was just as she described, I couldn't add anything.

"Since tomorrow is the beauty pageant, right? It would be weird to bring this up after the face-off is over, so the time to give these to you was now."

"[...]"

What kind of expression was I supposed to make in this kind of situation?

In other words, when Chiwa and the others had been collaborating amongst each other before the trip, the true reason for that was never 'to get in the way of me and Masuzu'.

It had been just *too* different.

From Chiwa and the other two we had been getting 'affection'.

And for our side, we had only played a part filled with 'faked affection'.

It was as different as that.

"[...] ...Complete defeat."

After giving a sight, Masuzu smiled.

"Thank you for this heartfelt gift. I will cherish this phonestrap dearly forever."

Masuzu looked at Chiwa, Hime, and Fuyuumi in sequence and thanked them. And it wasn't with her usual kind of sarcastic air. Rather, it was filled with gratitude that came from the bottom of her heart.

"I, too… Somehow... Sorry."

"Huh? Why are you apologizing?"

Chiwa tilted her head slightly.

"No, not that… Now is not the time for 'sorry', rather, um, 'thank you'."

I quickly corrected myself.

In this atmosphere, I couldn't kiss her *at all*.

◆

After ascertaining that everyone had returned to their own rooms, I went to Masuzu's room and knocked on her door.

"I'm sorry!"

In Dogeza[28] form, I bowed my head to Masuzu, who was sitting on the bed in her pajamas.

"I-I ended up being unable to kiss you! The way things turned out was beyond my expectations. Under that kind of circumstances, it was a little awkward for a kiss and... It was impossible for me! Sorry!"

"——Why are you apologizing?"

I looked up after hearing that gentle voice to then see a smiling Masuzu.

She appeared to be tired and filled with sadness.

"If you forcibly kissed me in that situation — I'd look down upon you with disdain."

"[...]"

"Unknowingly."

Masuzu shook her head.

Clasped in her hand was the "Otsu" strap.

"Unknowingly, I was a little taken aback. I ended up being moved by their gift. At the same time, 'what an unsightly creature I am', I just that thought to myself. Once again, I have been shown how much of a devil I am."

"No, that's just a thing of coincidence..."

"It's not a thing of coincidence."

Masuzu said while looking at that swaying 'Otsu'.

"It's definitely not a coincidence, Eita. Indeed, Harusaki-san and the rest look upon me as their enemy. But yet, at the same time, they are people who can gift me with this. They are people who can gift their adversary with such a thing... They are too different from me."

A heavy silence followed.

This might have been the first time I was seeing Masuzu reprimanding herself so much.

"I guess you won't be able to win tomorrow's contest."

"...Probably."

In her current state, Masuzu probably couldn't outdo others in demonstrating her 'dere appeal'.

"Perhaps it's better to just withdraw."

"Yeah. Frankly, I was thinking about that, but... Still, it's better to make an appearance and get judged. If I take her feelings into consideration..."

Masuzu stood up and took out my 'chuu-ni notebook' from her travel bag.

"Harusaki-san's chagrin and sadness towards me because of taking you away from her —— If I consider those feelings of hers, I can't just get defeated without a fight."

Flipping through the notebook, she showed the very last page.

The words written on it took up most of the two pages.

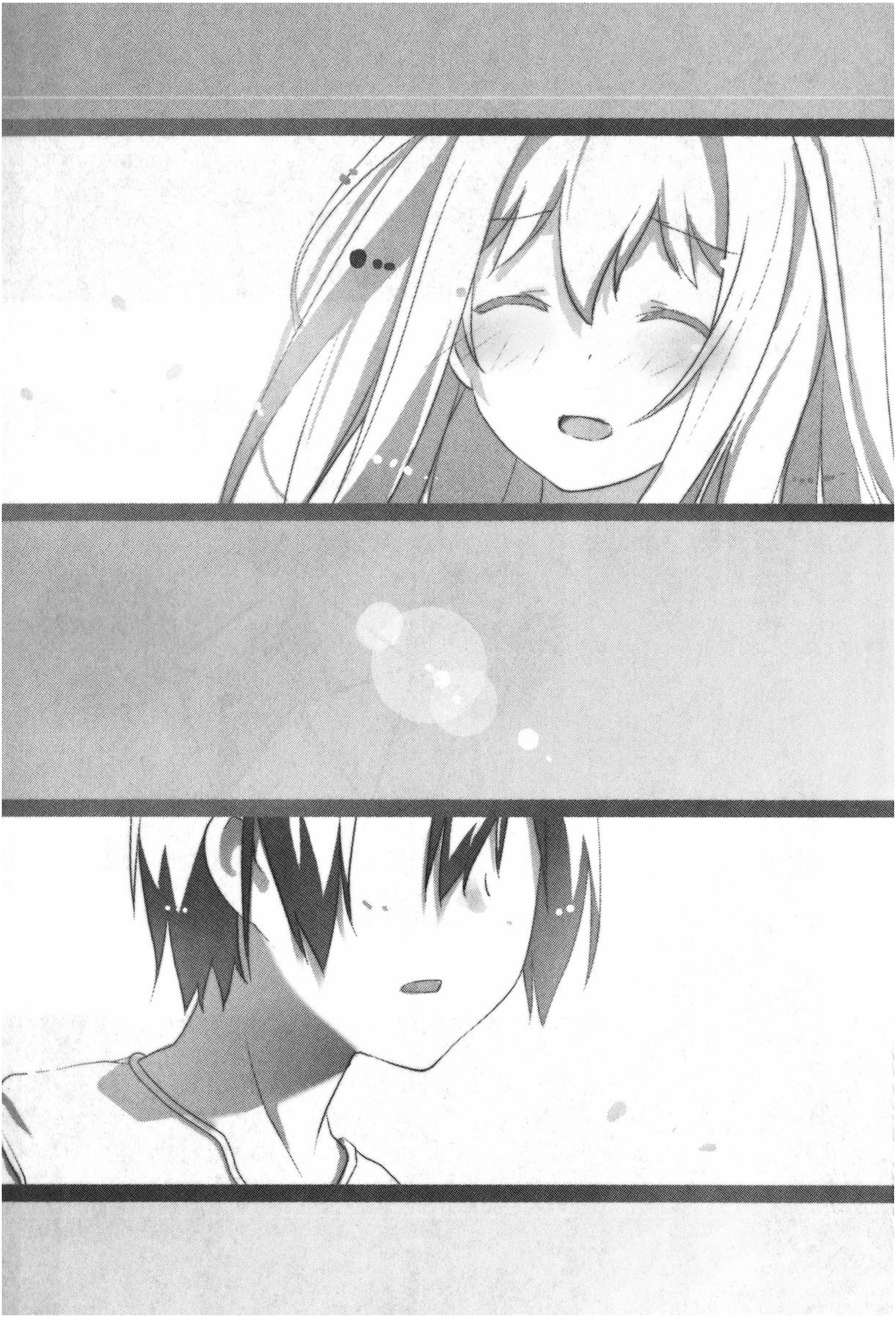
My heart stirred nostalgically.

I remembered the feelings at that time.

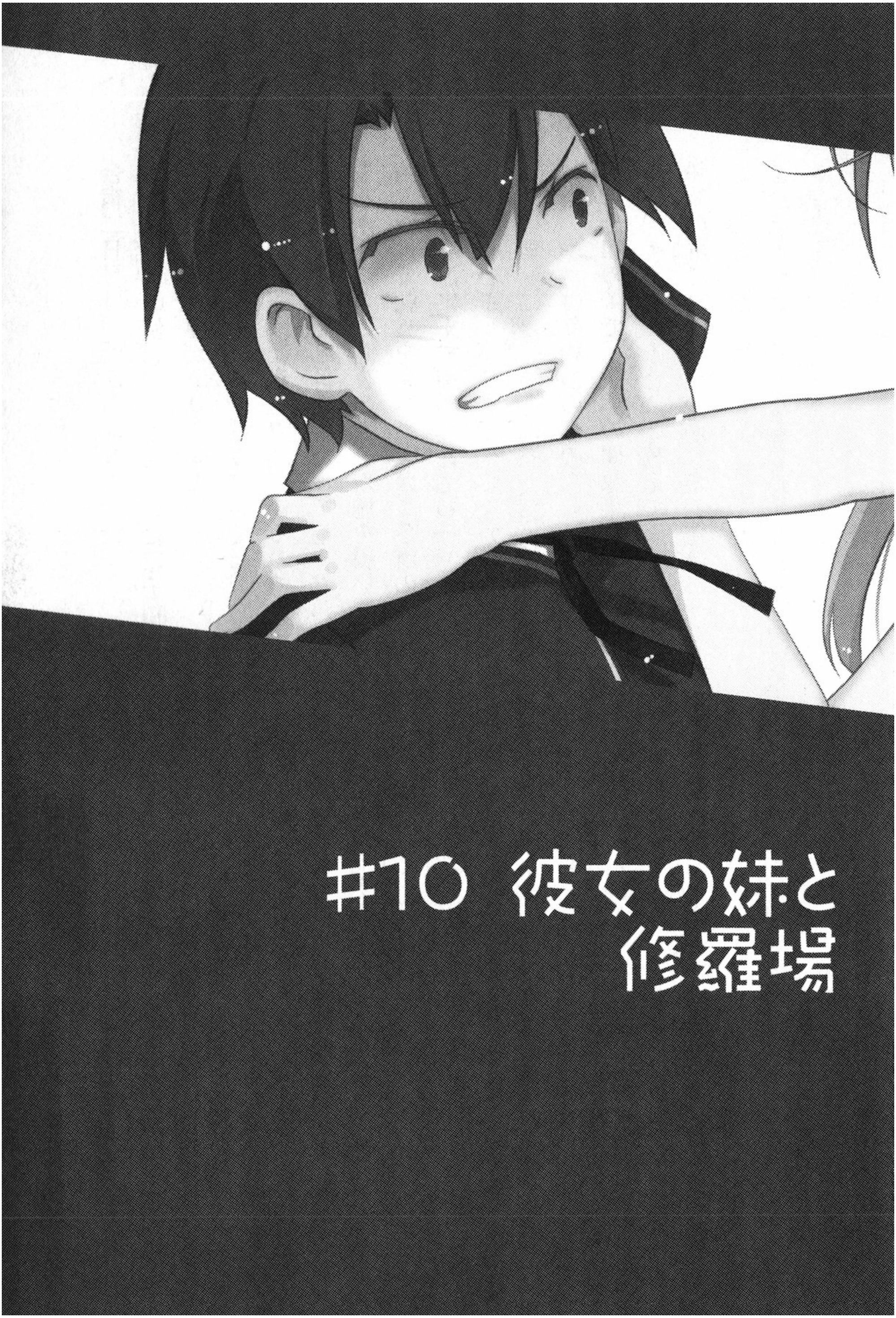
I'll become a doctor and cure Chiwa's body!

Masuzu then smiled quietly.

"Thanks for everything. After this training camp, you'll be free."



#10: Together With Girlfriend's Little Sister Mayhem



#10 彼女の妹と修羅場

The next day of camp I was very relaxed in the morning.

I made breakfast and around eight o'clock in the morning Chiwa, Hime, and Fuyuumi all gathered in the living room. But no matter how long we waited, Masuzu did not show up.

Since I was so worried, I went in front of her room to call her, but—

"I'll be sleeping until noon."

Driven away by an awkward usage of Japanese which seemed to suggest she had low blood pressure during mornings, I imagined she was the type who had a really hard time waking up.

Or, perhaps it's because she is really affected by what happened last night…

Only the four of us ate breakfast. Afterwards, Fuyuumi suggested that we started doing our summer homework.

Even though Chiwa whined and said, 'we've come all the way to the sea and we're going to do homework?!'. But I convinced her in the end. Besides, if I didn't bother this girl, she'd wait to do it until just before the deadline.

Hime very obediently complied and started doing her kanbun homework. Fuyuumi was very surprised, 'Your calligraphy is really beautiful!'. Hime indeed was really good at it.

I also started solving my mathematic problems as I sat next to Chiwa—

"Hey, Ei-kun! I said, teach me this."

I was pulled back to reality with a sudden jab to my elbow with the back of the pencil.

"O-Ohh, sorry."

This had been the third time I've gotten lost in my thoughts.

"Eita, are you tired?"

"It's really unusual for Kidou-kun to be unable to concentrate on studies."

Hime and Fuyuumi had puzzled looks on their faces. Indeed, even *I* thought this to be really unusual.

Unable to throw myself into the studies with the proper mindset, time flew, and before I knew it it was already noon.

For lunch, I prepared a vegetable noodle dish that could be eaten alone. I even prepared Masuzu's portion and went to her room to call her, but she said, 'not hungry', and thus declined.

"Is Natsukawa okay? Is it a summer cold?"

Chiwa slurped the slippery red-white noodles and tilted her head, puzzled.

"She looked just fine yesterday... Will she be able to participate in the beauty pageant?"

"What time does it start?"

Fuyuumi took out her cellphone and checked the screen:

"The venue opens at 4:00 P.M., and the show starts at 4:30. It says contestant should be there before 3:30 and gather in front of the special stage at the second beach."

"Yeah, she'll definitely get up before then."

Masuzu said it herself, she was going to be judged.

But what did she mean by that?

Did she actually intend to say that I was her fake boyfriend on stage? I doubted that it'd be like that, she could announce that we already went our separate ways.

After lunch, Chiwa suggested that we should go to the beach, but—

"Sorry, I don't feel like it."

I ignored the signs of displeasure from the three of them and walked outside by myself.

I wanted to walk about aimlessly.

Maybe this was some kind of depressive mood, but I was feeling a little bit more carefree.

I walked south along the beach at first, because northwards was the direction of Hanenoyama City, and I wanted to stay away from there as much as possible.

Towards the distance, towards the distance, towards the distance.

I braved the sun and listened to the sounds of waves as I started to be able to feel my own sweat. After walking for about thirty minutes, the building landscape around me changed. The old-fashioned houses from earlier were now replaced by lines of elegant mansions and hotels.

—Right, this was the third beach.

The second beach that we stayed at had been an actual 'beach', but over here there were exclusive vacation resorts. I remembered Kaoru say that he was very envious of this.

As I walked and looked at some unique cafes and trinket shops, I suddenly saw an entire group of tanned people. With that level of tan, I could only figure that they are local surfers.

In the middle of these tanned people, there was a little bit of red.

It was a girl wearing a bright red dress.

And she was blond.

As expected of a high-end resort destination, even foreigners came here— or so I thought, because as the distance between the two of us shortened, it seemed like her face looked familiar.

The girl evidently had the same line of thought, and kept turning her head.

When we reached the distance we could make out each other's appearances—

"Uge?!"

"Woah!"

We exclaimed nearly simultaneously.

"Why are *you* here?"

"Isn't that my line?!"

The person who said that as she stared at me was Natsukawa Mana.

She was still that same old noisy brat.

Even though I didn't notice it looking at her from far away but she was actually pulling a foreign-made bright red bicycle. She probably had a villa nearby, as expected of a bourgeois.

"Hey-hey, Mana-chan, who is that guy?"

One of the surfers accompanying her asked softly.

Mana responded with an annoyed look on her face:

"My older sister's boyfriend, and a disgusting otaku."

"'Disgusting otaku' was unnecessary!"

As soon as she finished speaking, her crowd of followers began to flatter her, 'Mana-chan has an older sister?', 'I knew it— I've always felt Mana was a little-sister type', 'If it's Mana-chan's older sister, she's bound to be a beauty'. And thus some grumbling started among them. *What's with these guys? They have a little bit too much free time at their hands.*

Mana seemed to approve and looked very pleased. After listening to all the praise:

"Listen, you guys can head back. I have some things to talk to him about."

Naturally, the surfers gave an 'Eeeh—!?' reaction.

"Sorry. Thanks for chatting with me, see ya later!"

Mana wore a smile as she put her hands together, and so she smiled at the group with a carefree cat smile and turned around.

"How's that? I got rid of them."

"A nice way of wrapping things up."

Mana looked back at the group of guys several times, and as they waved with stupid grins on their faces, she then spoke

"Among that gang of flirting bastards, there's not a single decent man. As I was thinking, 'Just how long till I can drop these guys', I had to run into you. You so happened to appear at a good time."

Her indifferent tone was actually the opposite of her facial expression.

"In other words, you have absolutely nothing to speak to me about."

"While it's true that I didn't had anything in mind— we might as well talk a bit as we walk."

Not waiting for me to respond, she held onto her bike and started to walk. She was just like her sister, always enjoying forcing others to do what she wanted them to.

"So, are you staying around here?"

"Yeah, I have a villa."

"Why at Funase beach? If you have that money, why don't you go abroad to Ouvea island?"

"Ah, I went last year."

"[...]"

So, the returnee has already been there, you should switch with Hime.

"Yay— That's so amazing! You really have some high class, you really win at life!"

Even though I originally intended to point out that this had been an ironic statement, then—

"Well, that's obvious, right? If *I* were not to be considered as winning in life, then who is actually 'winning'?"

She totally didn't get it. This fellow was no good.

"Oh right, why are you here? Did Suzu also come here?"

"Yeah, it's a club trip."

"That 'delusional' club?"

"That's rude. It's 'Jien-Otsu'."

"It's roughly about the same, right?"

"…It is."

I couldn't argue with that. I could only agree.

"So what? Are you getting along smoothly with Suzu?"

"[...]"

I knew she would ask that.

"Hey, how are you? Are you becoming closer? You've kissed at least already, right?"

"...I don't want to answer."

"Eh? What's with this? Who do you think you are?"

I was infuriated.

"Even though I didn't particularly expect you to use honorifics, you shouldn't call me -you[29]— You are so rude to your seniors!"

"Aaah— Just shut up already! Just because you embarrassed me once, you're thinking that you can deal with me however you like?"

I thought Mana would become angry and leave with a 'hmph!', but I never expected her to continue walking next to me.

As a blonde-haired middle school girl, with hair tied into two pigtails, which was waving in the sea breeze, of course she was attracting everyone's attention. The men we brushed by seemed jealous, which made me uneasy.

Well, this was the usual course when one is around Masuzu, too.

"What do you think? Everyone's looking at me."

Mana looked up at me triumphantly.

"Even though Suzu is incredibly beautiful, she has that difficult-to-approach feeling, right? From that perspective, I'm different. I'm totally super cute! Are you happy to be walking next to a beautiful girl like me?"

"Hahaa?"

I couldn't help but to laugh out loud.

"Don't confuse me with the guys you find everywhere——— Because *I*...!"

It's here!

It's here, the time to settle it!

"*I* won't be captivated by any kind of woman! I'm *anti-romance*——————!"

Finally…

In reality, I've always wanted to say it out loud. It's too cool!

"What kind of idiot are you, you virgin?"

[...]

W-Whaaaat?

"H-Hmph! Virgin? To *me*, that's a great compliment!"

"Disgusting, disgusting, disgusting, disgusting, disgusting, disgusting, go to hell, go to hell, go to hell!"

A-Aah.

Have I just been called 'disgusting' and told to 'go to hell' by a middle school girl?

Can't possibly be that I'm the absolute worst lame-type of guy that there is in the world, right...?

No, more importantly—

"How refreshing…"

"W-What is?"

Because I've been dealing with so many girls that can't take a hint lately!

A girl that is so cold towards me - it's the best!

"Why are you smiling so creepy to yourself? That's absolutely, utterly disgusting."

"Do it some more, try cursing me some more!"

"Y-You're seriously disgusting! Don't come near me, virgin! You are the official representative of the Japanese virgins!"

"Yes, just like that! Keep going, keep going! Hnnnnng—!"

Mana's face turned blue and cramped.

"I-I won't go with you anymore! I'm going home, bye!"

She straddled the seat cushion of her bike and headed off.

But after going barely five meters forward, she wobbled off balance.

kalangclang!

…She fell loudly.

Her red dress and blond hair were full of sand.

"T-That's just a test! Next time is the real deal!"

Mana gave an excuse nobody wanted to hear and stood up. Once again, she straddled the seat.

This time, she probably rode about ten odd meters, but she still wobbled off balance.

kalangclang!

I pointed at Mana and giddily jumped back and forth on the side.

"Oh? Oh? What is it now~? Could it be that you can't ride a bicycle~? Natsukawa Mana-san~? You're already a ninth grader~"

I grabbed this point to provoke her and Mana's face turned entirely red.

"That looks so awkward! Haha! Ta-kun Epic Win—!"

Winning against a middle school girl and boasting about it, I'm just too awesome!

Awesome!

…Awesome... was it?

Did that mean I was just common… scum?

When I started to doubt myself, Mana grabbed her face and squatted down.

"*s-*… *sob*… Don't… laugh like that..."

Aaah, Did I really make her cry?!

"S-Sorry, I got too carried away. My bad."

"*sob*! Wuahhhh!"

"It really was my fault, okay? Here, grab my— Hey!"

Just when I reached out with my hand, my wrist was ruthlessly yanked, and of course I fell. I tumbled forward with much more momentum than when Mana fell, and raised a good deal of dust on the road.

"Kya~hahahahahaa! I—diot! You've been tricked!"

"Y-You vicious fake crying precocious brat!!"

"Hey, just don't touch me, you virgin! If I get cursed to stay a virgin for a lifetime, what were I going to do?"

"Oh— That sounds interesting— We should give it a try, come 'ere—!"

In broad daylight and in a public place, I was brawling with a female middle school student— I can't be saved!

◆

We decided to leave the scene because the people who were gathering around us started to cause a commotion.

I helped her pull the bike and the two of us arrived at an empty playground.

"Here should be all right."

Mana sat on the bench.

After propping the bike up with the kickstand, I also sat down.

"Since you obviously can't ride, why'd you take a bicycle out?"

"I said I can ride! Just forgot how to a little moment ago."

Why are you making up an excuse that can be summed up as 'can't ride'?

Mana stared at me steadily.

"So, how is Suzu? Is she all right? It's really hot everyday. And has she been eating properly?"

"So you are worried about what's happening with your nee-san to that extent?"

Mana turned her face away when she heard that.

"I-It's not that I'm worried. It's more like I'm obliged to report about her to dad."

"Sure."

Despite everything she babbled about, she was actually quite considerate of her sister. But if I mentioned that, she would just get angry.

So I told her everything that was recently going on with Masuzu in great detail.

Of course, I also mentioned what happened last night— I kept to myself the fake thing, but I did tell her, 'maybe we'll break up'.

"—Yeah, it's at the limit."

Mana murmured after listening to it all.

"But you've done well to last this long. Despite Suzu's distrust towards people."

"Is that so?"

Mana kicked some small rocks at her feet.

"You know, overseas Suzu is called 'the Natsukawa family jewel'."

"Meaning they are boasting about their daughter?"

"That's half of it. The remaining half is irony."

"Irony?"

"A jewel is an 'accessory'. Within Dad's social circle, Suzu is just a stage prop so he can boast, 'I have such a beautiful daughter'. He separated Suzu from her mother just to do this."

"So you really are half siblings?"

"Yeah. You've never heard that from Suzu?"

"She never said anything, I also didn't mean to pry."

But based upon their hair and eye color, it was obvious.

"Suzu always acts in accordance to father's expectations, because public opinion of her will reflect public opinion of her mother. She perfectly performed a docile character who is smart, dignified, and respectful of her father. Acting like a 'good girl' in front of strangers in a foreign land used to be the meaning of Suzu's entire existence."

Masuzu who had pretended she was a good girl.

Masuzu who pretended she was a 'girlfriend'.

She hadn't changed at all from the past. Rather, she couldn't be changed, because this was her way of life.

"From the very beginning, the first thing I thought about that kind of thing was, 'this is impossible!', also dad didn't put those hopes on me. But Suzu *could* do it. After answering those expectations, she forced herself to keep on acting, and continued to tell lies—— In that process she started to become strange."

Mana looked up at a towering cumulonimbus cloud that looked like a skyscraper:

"You'd think that there aren't many people who'd say this, right? In order to lie, you have to lie to yourself first. I need to be a good girl. I need to be a good girl. A good girl. I am a good girl— In the middle of lying, you suddenly forget who you really are."

Masuzu seemed to be like this right now.

While she was acting out love, did she come to the realization that she didn't understand anything about it?

"The things that girl says are ridiculous, right? Just after saying something extremely harsh, the next moment she becomes tender. And the moment you think that, she suddenly becomes cold— Hey, you have had a round of this kind of interactions, right?"

"Yeah."

That description is far *too accurate.*

Ever since Masuzu confessed to me, I've been taken for a roll by her.

I don't know how many times I've cursed.

I don't know how many times I shouted, 'it's 'mayhem''.

—*However*.

"However, it wasn't that bad."

I said firmly.

"It wasn't that bad——— This everyday life."

Mana whispered quietly, 'true'.

She lightly jumped up from the bench and her double ponytail drifted in the air as she turned back to me.

"Thank you for liking my onee-chan."

◆

It was almost evening and I decided to return to the hotel.

Mana looked like she still wanted to hang around the park a little longer.

"Bye then."

When I got up, I suddenly realized it:

"Oh, I finally understand it."

"What is it?"

"You———— came here to practice riding the bike, right?"

"U-Wha…?!"

Mana looked like a fish from a pond, with her mouth wide open. It looked like I had hit a bullseye.

"I-I-I said I know how to ride a bike! Go away you disgusting otaku!"

"S-S-Sure. Sorry for being so disgusting."

I just waved my hand and started to walk away.

But then I suddenly remembered something:

"Hey."

"I said I know how to ride a bike!"

I asked that middle school student who was shouting with regret:

"If there was someone suited to be together with Masuzu, what would that person be like?"

Mana tilted her head, 'Ha?', and thought about it for a while.

"When it's about a 'liar', then it's pretty obvious that there is only one type."

"What type of person?"

I held my breath and waited. Then, Mana whispered:

——An accomplice.

#11: The Beauty Contest Pageant is Mayhem

#11 ミスコンで修羅場

I ran all the way back to the second beach.

Because I got lost on the way back, I wasted a lot of time. When I checked my phone as I ran, I realized it was already 4:32 PM, which meant the contest started two minutes ago. Originally, I wanted to talk to Masuzu before it all started.

"Eh……!?"

When I finally reached the beach, it was so packed that it didn't look anything like yesterday. These must have been spectators for the event. The stage next to the beach kiosk seemed really far away.

You've got to be kidding me......

It'd take a lot of effort to get close to the stage, right?

As I tried to push my way through the crowd, a nearby speaker began to broadcast music very loudly.

My surroundings filled with the sound of applause.

The large screen to my right displayed the image of the stage.

Saeko-san in a T-shirt, was holding a microphone. Judging by how her eyes seemed to be squinting like slits, she must have been in「weak mode」.

"Let's have it—what everyone's been waiting for ~「Use your Love Points to Water the Summer ❤「OreDere」Beauty Pagent」, will now begin~"

Afterwards, Saeko-san waved on screen, and the sound of the applause and cheers amplified.

Since this was an event at the beach in the countryside, I didn't think it would be so many people—who knew the turnout would be so great?

They really have no problem with it?

"Uh—it's rather bothersome to make opening marks ~ so I'm just going to introduce the participants~"

Saeko-san's careless and weak mode really matched. Just like this, she narrated the event.

"First is the entry number one, Harusaki Chiwa ~ high school first year ~"

What, it's Chiwa already?

The screen showed the figure of Chiwa in a bathing suit as she stepped onto the stage from the side.

At this moment, the audience very welcomely cheered, 「Ohh!」「How short~」「So cute—!」「Just like a chihuahua!」. I felt like the most of the cheers came from women.

—Hey Chiwa, how do you feel now that others say you're cute?

I was as happy as if I was being praised myself, and it made be feel rather embarrassed.

But Chiwa—she still looked quite nervous. Although it wasn't as extreme as the time when we practiced confessions, but her expression was very tight and her movements were shaking.

"Well then, Chiwa-chan. Please introduce yourself to our audience—"

"O-Ohkay!"

Chiwa's voice cracked when she answered, and with a flushed face she faced the audience.

"I-I'm Harusaki Chiwa! Ah, um—high school first year! In the past I practiced kendo! I really like sinewy diaphragm meat and beef intestines. I've also recently started to read Shoujo manga….. and that's it?"

I thought she was going to talk about the things she likes to eat, but I didn't expect her to mix internal organs with shoujo manga in her introduction.

"Next—let's please ask Chiwa-chan to demonstrate her dere ~" [30]

Now was it.

This was the selling point of this competition, and the theme.

"Chiwa-chan, first of all, is the person who you love at this venue?"

"Ah, yes, I think so."

"What kind of person is that boy~? "

Damn! Saeko-san must be secretly laughing. Her snickers are way to exaggerated.

What made you so happy, you bastard?

"Ah—um...... Well, how should I put it? He's obstinately serious."

"Eh? Not your average kind of serious?"

"You could say he's not flexible, loves to worry about things, or is clumsy. Ah—for example, when deciding to buy lightly flavored or strongly flavored curry seasoning packs, he has to ponder about it carefully. Just ask for a sample!"

"Ahahaha, that really is obstinately serious—"

The audience also resounded with laughter.

"I wasn't that worried about it that time! W-W-When I was buying it, weren't you the one who rushed ahead and threw it in the basket? Correct yourselfffffffffff!"

I tried to yell from where I stood, but the sound didn't reach the stage.

"But, with him so obstinately serious like that, it makes me feel like I can't leave him no matter what. And since we've been together since we were little, we even know each other's sizes!"

"Eh? He's your childhood friend?"

"Yes! He's as cute as a little brother!"

The audience again roared with laughter.

Damn! No matter how you look at it, it's more like you're the「little sister」! If this crowd of people saw me, they'd definitely agree!

"Also, he has a lot of nicknames! For example,「Women's Toilet Overdrive」and「Shining bald devil」? And then there's also「Anti-platonic love」!"

Aaaahh.

Aah.

Enough, enough. Ahhhhhhh.

I'm never coming with this girl to Funase again……

But if they're not revealing my name, I guess it's okay.

"But, even if Ei-kun's like that."

She said it! She said, 「Ei-kun」!

……But since it's a nickname, I guess I'm still safe?

"Ah, when I say Ei-kun, I actually mean Kidou Eita."

"Why do you want to corner me?!"

I couldn't help but shout, attracting raised eyebrows from the audience around me. Damn, this is basically like a confession to me 「Kidou Eita」.

"Even if Ei-kun is like that, he's actually a really, really considerate person. I'm always receiving Eita's help, but I can never do anything for him. Not only that, but I always give him trouble, feel jealous about him, and I feel like―I really am a useless girl."

Chiwa lowered her tone.

The audience that had been so rowdy earlier also became quiet.

"Ei-kun has really really done way too much for me. I really don't know what I should do that's good? What's right? ……How should I say it? Although I really want to show you my dere, in truth—how do I put it…… I can only say 「thank you」......"

Chiwa looked up towards the sky, and then once again faced forward,

"Although I'm this kind of person, I'm going to train my maiden traits in our club activities, and I'm going to become more and more considerate—and I hope I can be a childhood friend and a girl worthy of you! I've always really really wanted to thank you! Ei-kun! I love you!"

Chiwa lowered her head and bowed.

Then her entire face turned red, and she dashed and disappeared off the side of the stage.

The applause from the audience was the loudest today, and it truly was great applause.

"Ffff......"

Chiwa, this girl. In the end, what she said wasn't bad at all.

This way, there's no way I can be angry at her......

◆

The screen once again displayed Saeko-san.

It was about five o'clock in the evening, and the wind was rather chilly. However, the audience just kept growing. I don't know much about beauty pageants, but did they really gather this many people? Was Saeko-san's company actually really influential?

"Next up ~ entry number two, Akishino Himeka-san, please enter the stage!"

Huh, next was Hime? The people from our club were going continuously.

"Akishino-chan? Akishino-chan?"

This was strange.

Saeko-san called a few times, but Hime still didn't appear.

It couldn't be—was she so nervous that she couldn't come out?

No, that was possible.

With such an unexpectedly large audience gathered under the stage, if it were me in the same situation, I'd be intimidated. Hime was never good at this kind of thing, so if she became petrified at the last moment.

Maybe she is at the side of the stage right now, shaking by herself.

When I thought that, I suddenly felt pity……

"Eita, will you hold me?"

"Yeah, if I were with her right now and held her……. what?!"

I looked back, and there was Hime wearing a swimsuit right next to me.

She tightly gripped my arm and trembled.

"W-What is it, Hime? Why are you here?"

"......Hold me......"

Hime rattled and shook, and held tightly to my arm.

It looked like she was scared, so she fled.

Conscious of the fact that guys around me were looking at me like, 「why is this guy so popular?」, I tightly wrapped myself around Hime's shoulders.

"Hime, are you nervous?"

"I can't do it. I can't be like Chihuahua."

Hime's delicate shoulders were helplessly quivering, and it nearly made my own body start to shake.

"That's not true. You can do it."

I took out my cellphone, and showed the 「Jien-Otsu」 phone strap to her,

"You're a member of the maiden's club, too? Right?"

"......"

Hime's body still did not stop trembling. But really, if I said a few things, I could probably solve it without Hime running away.

A thought flashed through my head:

—Wouldn't it be nice to run away?

If she forfeited from the beauty pageant, it wasn't a big deal. That stuff about becoming a bride if someone takes first place, Saeko-san wasn't being serious. Also, I didn't intend to follow up with it.

"Hey, Hime, if you're so afraid......"

When I was in the middle of sentence—

"Hey, Himecchi! Come out—!"

I looked back at the sudden big roar, and the big screen showed the「devil disciplinary committee member's」figure. Her expression was sharply grave, which didn't match the cute bikini she was wearing. Also, I didn't know what she was looking straight into the camera.

"After all, you're the one who works the hardest in our club. If you run away at the last moment, all of your efforts from before will be wasted, and as your master I can't let this happen!"

Huh! Quite expected of Ai-chan, she's very attached to her apprentice.

Since she gambled on going this far already, I couldn't give up yet.

"Eita, what should I do?"

Hime seemed to feel something, and leaned against my body.

"Well......"

What was the opposite of fear?

Un-fear? No, not that. Happiness? Peace? Love?

Ah, it's「love」.

"Right, Hime. Use「love」to cover up your「fear」. What do you love the most?"

"Eita."

"Oh, wow."

She replied immediately. Basically, I just got another confession.

"Okay, okay, I get it! Then say you like me ten times!"

"??? I don't really understand."

Hime tilted her head, confused. Why do you pick this moment to return to normal?

I felt a rush of heat rising to my cheeks, and I said,

"I-It's….. just think it's the same as a black magic incantation! Summon the elements and words of your favorite things that you've stored to fill your energy source, vreooooommmm—! "

Although I didn't understand that last part myself, but—

"I understand."

Hime nodded. Quite expected of my past (universe) girlfriend, she's quite connected to my soul.

"Can I begin to chant now?"

"Oh, anytime is fine."

Hime immediately extended her arms and wrapped them around my back.

—Hug!

"Oh......!"

In between my chest and Hime's chests, there was, uh—

......Squeeze.

Soft.

Not good.

Ah.

Errrrr.

I've always felt.

How should I put it?

Even though I've noticed ever since I saw Hime wear a swimsuit.

Even though I felt that if I said it out loud, it would cause a pimple.

Even though it's probably bad to look at a girl like Hime this way……. and so forth.

B-B-But, I should probably say it?

Hime. Has. Very. Large—

"I love you."

This was a sudden attack.

Its destructive power was amazing.

Her sweet and slightly hoarse voice, the temperature of her snow white skin, and the softness of how close she was.

"Eita, I love you."

This time, the voice was very clear.

"Ever since I've met Eita, I've changed a lot. I love you."

Where our skin came into contact, I could feel Hime's warmth.

"I can now say hello to my classmates. I love you."

All of a sudden, my entire body heated up.

"I've also made three friends. I love you."

Every time Hime moved, I felt a tingling sensation in my head.

"I used to think I'd never be able to come to the sea my entire life. I love you."

That was no big deal.

"I want to be Eita's number one, but if I'm rejected, then I'm alright with being number two. I love you."

What did she mean by first or second? Wasn't Hime just Hime?

"Even if I became third or less, as long as Eita smiles for me occasionally, I'll be happy. I love you."

Even there wasn't such thing as a third, if it's just a smile I can do that any time.

"Even if Eita starts to hate me, the person I love the most will always be Eita."

....

Was it ten times yet?

I only respond once.

I hugged Hime as tightly as I could, and whispered softly,

"Of course I'll never hate you."

"……I'm happy."

Hime also tightly hugged me as she responded.

We were like a scene from a movie.

I was infatuated by the atmosphere, and almost forgot what the purpose of this was…… Oh right, I wanted to encourage Hime to go on stage.

"Hime, you're not scared anymore, right?"

"I'm not."

"Well, then go!"

And then I noticed.

I didn't know when, but the jam-packed shoulder-to-shoulder crowd had pulled away from us. Hime and I were precisely the center of an empty circle approximately five meters in radius.

The people next to us were instead staff members carrying cameras, as swell as Saeko-san who held a microphone.

The camera lens were locked onto Hime and me.

I looked back at the big screen, and saw a closeup of Hime and me hugging each other like lovers.

The audience near us were staring at us.

Spectators in the distance were fixated on the screen.

"Hey, Eita."

"......Hello."

I gently raised my hand to Saeko-san.

"Did you happen to catch - everything - from -before?"

"Yup. Because wasn't that the doll-haired girl's demonstration of her dere?"

"OH……" [31]

It seemed like even without going on the stage, Hime's part was already over.

For Hime, this must have been the best outcome.

But for me, this was the worst outcome.

To make things worse, much much worse, there were two shadows that crept close to me.

"Hey, Ei-kun, what are you doing? H-H-Hey, what are you doing?"

Despite having just given such a moving speech, the veins in this childhood friend's temple seemed to burst.

"Ta-kun, hey, Ta-kun? Even though I said I didn't mind what you do with Himecchi, I never said you could hug each other. H-H-Hey! I - never - said - so—!"

Despite having just demonstrated such consideration for her apprentice, this fiancée was now holding clenched fists.

"Hahahaha......"

Well—

Okay, okay—

Even though we were missing a person, I'm going to shout this anyways.

"Too much mayhem between my ex-girlfriend, childhood friend, and fiancée!"

#12: The Resolution to be a Boyfriend is Mayhem

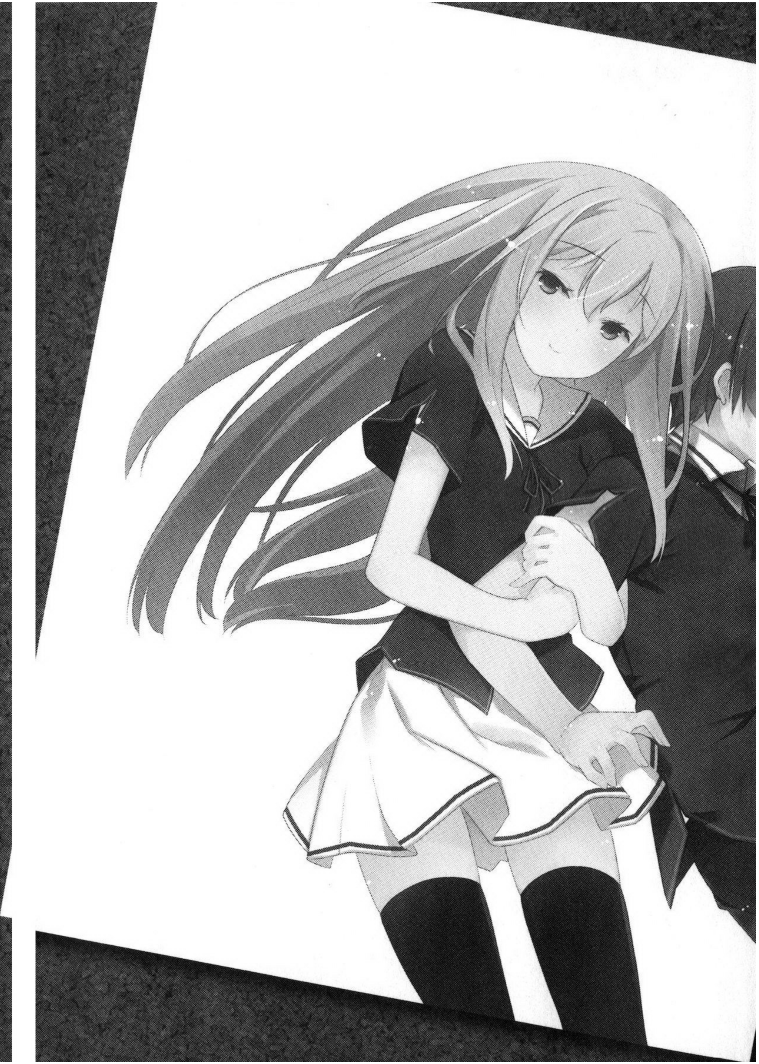
#12 彼氏を覚悟する修羅場

「ウソも百回つき続ければ真実になる」という人がいる。

だけど、それは「ウソ」だ。
ウソはウソだから。真実とは違う。

だけど。
それでも。
本気でウソをつく覚悟を決めた時、真実とは違う何かが見える。

あいつとなら、きっと——。



The result—

After that had been over, I was forced to kneel on the beach, suffering from a lecture while being sandwiched between Chiwa on the right and Fuyuumi on the left. Also, they again used an oil-based pen to write on my left and right arms. Fuyuumi wrote, 'shameless', and Chiwa wrote 'adulterer'. I'll take a hundred paces back and admit that shameless could fit, but it wasn't accurate to label me as an adulterer, right?

Also, Hime seemed very happy because she expressed her 'dere' very well. She was totally in a competitive mood:

"Hey, Master, contestant number eleven is really beautiful."

"Yeah, I guess she's okay. She's right on target at expressing her 'dere' appeal."

Fuyuumi was looking at the big screen and very impressively gave each contestant a review. Because she was so distracted lecturing me, she missed her scheduled time and was totally disqualified. She had told Hime not to run away, but in the end she ended up missing her own performance. How silly.

While I was forced to remain kneeling, I asked Chiwa who was grasping her knees:

"Hey, when is Masuzu's turn?"

"I remembered she was the twelfth, so that would be the next one?"

After the eleventh contestant received a round of applause and left from the side of the stage, Saeko-san immediately walked to the center of the stage.

—"Then the next one would be—— entry number twelve, Natsukawa Masuzu-san."

When Masuzu appeared on the stage, the noisy audience quieted down immediately. 'A foreigner? From which country?', 'Is that silver hair real?', 'So pretty…'. Voices of admiration came from all directions. This was a familiar sight that Masuzu and I had already seen happen countless times.

'The Natsukawa family jewel', was how Mana described it.

But I knew this girl's true nature.

I knew very well that she was a high school student who was arrogant, self-important, and conceited, who didn't know when she had taken something too far.

That's no jewel.

That's just an ordinary girl.

—"Masuzu-chan, first off, please introduce yourself."

Saeko-san prompted as Masuzu took the mike.

—"To the MC and everyone here, I have to make an apology."

—"Hmm? What's wrong?"

—"I've lost the right to participate in this contest. To be precise, I lost it last night."

Bewilderment spread throughout the venue, which was filled with a buzz that was different from the excitement earlier.

I clicked my tongue.

This is really what you've decided, huh, Masuzu?

—"What do you mean by that? Masuzu-chan?"

—"It's a simple thing. I got dumped by my boyfriend."

The buzz in the crowd increased suddenly.

Pointing at Masuzu who was standing there blanking, some lovestruck guys started saying, 'She's so beautiful that he couldn't handle it[32]', 'She probably has a really bad personality, right?', 'What matters in love is compatibility—'.

"...What do you know...?"

I clenched my fist.

What do you guys know about Masuzu? What do you know about her?

The difficulty of handling Masuzu is beyond your imagination.

Masuzu's bad personality is beyond your imagination.

And beyond your imagination, Masuzu and me have———

"Hey, Ei-kun, is that true? Did you guys really break up?!"

"Eita, what happened? Did president just speak the truth?"

"Break up? Then, Ta-kun is free? Does that mean Ai-chan is the epic winner yet again?!"

I let the questions from Chiwa and the rest slide.

I took action.

I kicked off from the sand, breaking into a sprint.

I pushed through the guys who made fun of Masuzu and aimed for the stage!

"MASUZU! IT'S MEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE!"

No use! My voice couldn't reach the stage from this distance. Masuzu couldn't hear me!

I pushed my way through the crowd and continued shouting as I ran.

"WHAT'S WITH THAT DEJECTION, MASUZU?!"

Masuzu did not look at me. She was merely answering Saeko-san's questions blankly.

"CAN'T YOU HEAR ME, MASUZU?! DONT KEEP LOOKING DOWN!"

As I thought, she couldn't notice me. The bad-mouthing around me was louder. My voice couldn't reach her.

As I forced my way through the people, I was rewarded with cold stares from around me. I got hit on the back and kicked on my legs. *Sorry. It's my fault. But forgive me, please. I-I have to get to her side!*

"AREN'T YOU THE PRESIDENT OF 'JIEN-OTSU'— SOMEONE WHO CAN BRING OUT HER MAIDEN SELF?!"

I yelled as I waved the '乙' strap, hanging from my cellphone, which I'd taken out.

SO UNTIL THE VERY END, ACT OUT NATSUKAWA MASUZU AND SHOW IT TO US!"

By the time Masuzu noticed me, I've already made it to the stage.

The crowd became silent, and Saeko-san's mouth was wide open.

"...W-What are you here for?"

Masuzu stiffened visibly as she stepped back.

While my shoulders bobbed as I was catching my breath, I grinned.

"Isn't it obvious? I came here to be your boyfriend."

"Like I said last night, it's fine!"

"Even if you are fine with it, I'm *not*."

I took the mike from Saeko-san, and my voice rang throughout the venue.

—"LET'S DO THIS AGAIN, MASUZU!"

"...Do you have any idea what you're saying?"

"I don't want to break up with you. I want to do it again, with you!"

"Do you have *any idea* what you're saying?"

Masuzu repeated her question.

"No matter how many times we redo it, it'll be the same. It will be nothing but a distorted mismatch. No matter how much a monkey imitates a human, to the human, it's just laughable. It's like that. A fake is still a fake. It can't become a real thing."

"That's fine, a monkey with its fellow monkey, a fake with his fellow fake, things might just go well after all."

"It's pointless. There's so many of those dazzling 'reals' around you, right?"

When she said that, she had a face contorted with so much pain, a face that I had never seen before.

—*Ah, I see.*

So that's it, Masuzu.

You've always been envious.

You've been so envious of Chiwa, Hime, and Ai that you can't stand it anymore.

But you know... I, too, am the same.

We're the same.

"Yeah. Every one of them is wasted on me. They are all real after all."

"Then why are you so attached to a fake?"

"The reason for that is obvious, right?"

I put my mouth near the mike, and proclaimed to the crowd:

—"THAT'S BECAUSE I LOVE NATSUKAWA MASUZU!"

I hollered at the top of my voice and even though some of the audience covered their ears... I think I did send it out clearly.

It should have reached Masuzu.

"The first time I saw you, I thought this, 'For someone to be so beautiful, her personality must be the worst', and for real, it is! An unbelievably wicked tongue! A stuck-up attitude that doesn't see her boyfriend as a boyfriend! A person who's smart enough not to dirty her own hands! However you think about it, she's just too horrible! She's really only a girl with looks! Such an extreme vileness before me! Idioooot!"

Hahaha, as expected, my true voice was filled with bad-mouthing criticisms.

The crowd had become totally silent, and even with these many people, only the sound of waves could be heard.

Saeko-san had a 'what is this?' look on her face.

Masuzu's mouth was gaping.

However, what came after was the real thing.

"That's why I'm fond of you! I love you!"

"I-I don't get what you're saying."

"Get it already! For someone as loathsome as you are——— There can only be a man who is as loathsome as me!"

Masuzu swallowed.

"Aren't you the one who knows the best how loathsome I am, and how disgraceful?"

The only person besides me who had come into possession of that notebook, was Natsukawa Masuzu.

The only person in this world who knew everything about my unsightly, weak self, was Natsukawa Masuzu.

"That's why you are the only one for me."

That was everything I wanted to say.

I acted with everything I got.

I lied with everything I got.

As for the rest, it would depend on my 'fellow actress', no, my 'fellow accomplice'.

"———— Don't joke around with me."

Masuzu smiled.

"You know, Eita. I've always hated you."

"...Eh?"

R-Really?

"I hated you. Someone like you... Do you remember, the first time we met, you turned your eyes away from me right away? Thanks to that, my first impression of you was the worst. 'What's with this rude man?' When other men looked at me, they seemed as if they had been paralyzed. As for you, you just made a disdainful face. You've really hurt my pride. Even when my only redeeming feature is my face. Why aren't you charmed by me? Why doesn't your face turn red? Why aren't you gazing at me?"

"...No, about that."

Did I do that sort of thing?

I can't remember at all...

"I couldn't stand it when your grades were better than mine. I couldn't stand it when you didn't try to talk to me even when my seat was beside yours. When I had no choice but to speak with you, you merely replied nonchalantly, and immediately returned to your conversation with your best friend. I also couldn't stand it when you got friendly with your childhood friend. I can't believe you prefer a pipsqueak like her over me. Even though I should be able to bring a lot more fun moments. 'I'll *definitely* give you hell', I thought. I've always, always hated you. That's why when I got hold of *that*, I was really trembling in happiness each time I made you depressed. Whenever I saw your tearful face, I was really on top of the world. And at the same time, down in the dumps. Since with that, you got to know the real me. With that, you would surely loathe me——— But yet..."

Masuzu trailed off and looked up at the sky.

Before I knew it, the sky was bright orange from the setting sun.

"But yet, you were so kind."

Transparent droplets rolled down Masuzu's cheeks.

"You were much gentler and kinder to me after knowing me than before. That's just impossible."

A sobbing voice sounded from the stage.

Masuzu was crying...

"Hey, Masuzu."

I braced myself and asked boldly-

"Are those tears genuine? Or are they fake?"

"I don't know."

From that cracked voice, it seemed like those tears were genuine.

"I don't know myself. I don't even know who I am."

"Then, I shall decide that for you—"

I grabbed Masuzu's trembling shoulders, drew her to me and closed in with my lips towards hers, while I said:

"*You* are my 'girlfriend'. Stay as my 'girlfriend', Masuzu."

—With that, I fulfilled the promise which I hadn't been able to fulfill yesterday.

I could hear the rousing, howling cheers coming from below the stage.

As I thought about the 'mayhem' that was going to ensue after this, my legs couldn't help but tremble.

'But right now, let me just indulge in this fake kiss', I thought.

#13: Heading to a New World Mayhem

#13 新しい世界への修羅場

After numerous other incidents at the 'OreDere Beauty Pageant', a 10-year-old fourth-grader had won the contest.

Her speech on how she had been very thankful that her father took her to the beach even though he was busy with work, apparently had been a great show of her 'dere appeal'. Even though she expressed it very clumsily, the sincere effort received very favorable reviews. I never expected there to be any competitors like her, but she was definitely the cutest, and she captured the hearts of everyone the best. Apparently, this was the age where 'girls' surpassed 'women'. I guess we can say that the so-called girly power had became more widespread than female power.

As for the members of our 'Jien-Otsu', only Chiwa had barely managed to be mentioned honorably. Anyways, the prize was 'a year's worth of gal-games and otome-games' in software, and Chiwa didn't even have a game console.

As for Masuzu and my own performance, neither of us had got a pick.

While the audience had been very excited, the judges commented in a tsukkomi fashion, 'erm, this guy was just confessed to by contestant number two (laughs)'. With that, the approving cheers I had gotten from the audience immediately turned to disgust in a second, so it ended up with not being helpful to the contest. Whatever! After all, I guess I was too popular! I should have just disappeared!

After the contest, no one had been able utter a word.

For dinner I had made potato stew but everyone gloomily stayed in their own rooms. I put their dinners in front of their doors, to see if they were willing to eat at one point. Even though this was the last night of camp, this made me feel rather lonely.

Well, I guess it had been just my fault.

I guess Chiwa, Hime, and Fuyuumi didn't want to see my face.

But, why had even Masuzu been gloomily hiding herself in her room? It would have been okay if she were full of rage or hate, but it was frightening that she isn't responding.

I had resolved to ready myself for the utmost consequences after she came out of her room, but that little that had built up turned out to be an 'one-man show'...

◆

The following morning.

When I woke up, Masuzu's beautiful face was in front of my eyes.

"[...] ...?!"

She was straddling my stomach and gazing down at me in light blue pajamas. Her hanging silver hair brushed across her cheeks.

"W-What are you doing? Masuzu-san?"

"I was looking at the sleeping face of the man who deceived me."

"O-Oh."

"I was going to kill you, heh."

"[...]"

Even though she was saying something really frightening, Masuzu's face was calm.

It was a complete change from her crestfallen expression yesterday, where it seemed like she was possessed by some evil.

"You should have slept a little longer. I was going to return you the favor from your sneak attack last night."

"Sneak attack?"

Aah, she must mean the kiss on stage.

"But, in the first place, you were the one who told me to kiss you."

"I didn't tell you to do it in front of so many people. We didn't even discuss or rehearse it."

"I didn't have a choice, right?! There was no time for that!"

Besides, even if we had discussed it, there was no way it would have turned out that way. It would have probably become some anxious, stammering and stumbling unnatural confession.

It was better to get a kiss done without any rehearsal, leaving it to the flow of things.

"Just to make sure, I want to verify something."

While still riding on me, Masuzu's face closed in.

"Your confession was a total act, right? You didn't really fall for me, right?"

"…That's obvious, isn't it?"

Her face peered into me just inches away and I averted my gaze.

"I really hate you. Once you return my notebook, I'll break up with you. Regardless of how beautiful your face may be."

"———I see."

Masuzu's eyes narrowed and her face came even closer.

"You're acknowledging that I have a beautiful face?"

Her sweet breath fell onto my nose. I felt faint.

"Hey, am I really that beautiful?"

"…D-Don't say something a person with a lovestruck mind would say."

Masuzu giggled.

"Say, if Harusaki-san's beauty points amount to 1, how much would mine amount to? Hey, hey."

"A-Are you really asking that!? You really have an extraordinarily bad personality!"

Upon saying that, Masuzu acknowledged that by puffing out her chest in an unapologetic way.

"Didn't you say it last night as well? My personality is the most horrid. That I am illnatured, shameless, insolent, impudent, brazen, vulgar, always humiliating, scorning, mocking, speaking ill of others, demeaning others, and..."

"Did I go to that extent!? Wasn't I much more lenient than that?!"

She could actually speak that badly of herself. Well done.

"...Stuck up, arrogant, willful, absurd, full of nonsense, unreasonable, pathetic, tragic, wretched——— and also a girl who loves you very much."

"[...]"

"Remember this well, Eita. Your 'girlfriend' is 'that' kind of a woman."

...Now, the last part was fake, right?

Masuzu?

"By the way, the last thing about 'loves you very much' is the most tragic part."

"Why?! Why is loving me tragic?!"

"That's obvious, right? To follow you to the place of mayhem between 2 x childhood friends + ex-girlfriend, there's nothing more tragic than that."

"Guh."

I can't argue with that!

Following that, in a covering fashion, she collapsed onto me. In between the cotton blanket, she pressed against me and consequently, I came to know her exact body shape.

"E~ita ♪"

"...?!"

This woman, just where did that voice come from?

Did I hear it wrong? It was like this voice of a really lovely girl...?

"Uwufufu. Eita. E~i~i~t~a~a. Such a wonderful person is my boyfriend. Fufufu."

"...Ma—"

Masuzu's broken! She's finally broken!

No, wait—

"T-This is also an act, right? You're faking it, right?"

Masuzu then looked up.

"That's obvious, right? Did you think that I'll seriously do such a loathsome 'flirtatious lovey-dovey' act? Please don't insult me."

"Y-Yeah, so true. Aah, I was surprised."

"Jeez. Eita gets so easily deceived."

"Hahaha, I got fooled."

"I also love this about Eita."

"...?!"

While lying on me and hugging me, Masuzu started rubbing her cheeks against my chest.

As if she was rubbing a scent onto my body, she kept rubbing. Consequently, the bed creaked.

Just like that time on the bus.

The only thing different from then was that her body was glued to mine and my entire body was shaking left, right, up, and down. *What's this? Geez. Jeez! Aah— things are becoming really strange!*

"M-Masuzu-san? What are you doing?"

"A trick."

"Am I still in elementary school!"

"Breathing with gills."

"Why a fish?! I'm asking you what's all the cheek rubbing for!"

"Aah, this? This is———— 'monyo-monyo'."

My head went blank.

"[...] ...M-Mo-nyo?"

"Yeah, mo-nyo-mo-nyo. It's very good for the health."

Masuzu's eyes were sparkling'

"I've always had a frail body up until elementary school. Even for school lunches I was the last to finish. For track sprints, I was also the last. I always got gloomy when the annual autumn sports meet came, and as the day drew near, I would hang the Teru Teru Bozu[33] upside down. At that time, I chanced upon the 'mo-nyo-mo-nyo'. Just by doing five minutes of this exercise in the morning after waking up and before sleeping every day, day after day, my stamina gradually increased, my appetite came, my waist became narrower, and even my luck with money got better. I was so much healthier than before. Even now, my friends and relatives have recommended continuing with it."

"…It's impossible to improve your luck with money…"

"Just my humble opinion."

"Aah, then say that at the beginning!"

"By the way, frankly, a person who experiences mo-nyo-mo-nyo has an eighty-seven percent chance of getting pregnant afterwards."

"That's a lie, that's just not possible!"

"Just my humble opinion."

"THAT'S NOT AN OPINION, IT'S CLEARLY YOUR IMAGINATIOOOOOOON!"

The comeback line was so intense that my throat went hoarse.

As I was gasping for breath, Masuzu snuggled up to me.

"Hey, Eita."

"…What?"

"Coming to the beach and staying overnight with a boyfriend, mucking and flirting around in the morning on the bed, all that makes me feel as if my body is rotting from the core."

"Yeah, totally."

While listening to the sound of waves, we exchanged such idle talk that can be said to be downright completely useless.

There was nothing to be gained, nothing of value to obtain from speaking or listening to it.

However, as to whether I disliked that or not—

Masuzu hit both my cheeks with her hands:

"Rotting and returning to the earth with you, may not sound like a bad idea."

"[...]"

What does she mean by that?

Does she mean she is going to give up on being anti-romance?

At that moment.

"Eita, are you awake?"

After a knock on the door, I could hear Saeko-san's voice call out to me.

It seemed like today, she was in awake-mode.

"Stay quiet", I told Masuzu with my eyes and then replied:

"I-I'm awake. What's up?"

"I came to see you before going back to the office. There's something I need to talk to you about, can you come down for a while?"

"All right. I'll be right there."

After waiting for a while for Saeko-san's presence to disappear completely.

"Masuzu, go back to your own room."

"I wonder what does your aunt want to talk about?"

"Who knows...?"

I was quite sure it was about the contest yesterday, though.

Masuzu's shoulders drooped.

"I didn't manage to win the contest after all. Perhaps, she really has no intention of accepting me as your girlfriend."

Quite frankly, even as her family, I didn't know either.

I wonder how Saeko-san took what had happened yesterday.

"Well, at any rate, I'll be going."

"Will it be okay? Shall I come along?"

I said to Masuzu who was looking at me anxiously:

"Trust your 'boyfriend', would you?"

"—Hm, got it."

'Be careful', Masuzu whispered into my ear and kissed me lightly on the cheek.

...Ermmmm.

Somehow, somehow...

Even I no longer knew whether this was a fake or not...

◆

When I walked into the living room, I smelled the aroma of coffee.

"Eita, do you want some?"

Even though I wanted to hurry to the point of the conversation, I nodded anyway. Saeko-san brewed pretty good coffee.

The fresh light of the sunrise filled the room, and the living room echoed with my and Saeko-san's voices as we sipped coffee. The radio was quietly announcing the weather, and today it seemed like the entire country was cloudless and sunny.

When I remembered that we were supposed to leave Funase today, I felt a little reluctant...

I couldn't help but thinking it would be nice if we could play just a little bit more. After we went back, I'd again be going to cram school every day.

"That was quite the feat, yesterday."

"Ah-- Uh--- Yeah."

Because she mentioned it so suddenly, my response was really stupid.

"I never expected Eita to do such a bold thing. The stage almost collapsed. From the perspective of the event, such a steamy atmosphere is worth celebrating for——— But my own feelings are rather complex. I'm very worried about you, Eita."

"...I'm sorry."

"You're in a really dangerous place. I'd say the more serious you take things, the more serious the mistakes will be once things stray out of course..."

Saeko-san fiddled with her hair and scratched her head.

Then, she exposed a wry smile.

"But, there's another route. If you want to go out with her no matter what, then as your family member; I will warmly protect you both."

"Thank you."

I thanked her from the bottom of my heart.

"But Eita, you're now set for the 'shuraba' route. Are you prepared for it?"

"A-Ah..."

Mayhem.

I could only expect my ideal peaceful high school life to drift away... Farther and farther away.

But even assuming that Masuzu and I broke up, I didn't expect things to become peaceful either. It wouldn't be me and Chiwa like in middle school. With Masuzu, with my girlfriend, I had to endure so to create a balance between my childhood friend, ex-girlfriend, and fiancée, or else it'd crumble right away. I have no clue on how to do this. Anyways, I was stuck in a dead end.

"Another even. There's still another possibility."

Saeko-san said as if she could see through my thoughts.

"A point where you can avoid the 'shuraba' and the harem-route, this is the 'third route'."

"T-That would be dreamlike route! If there's this kind of alternative, please tell me!"

My eyes suddenly turned bright. As expected of Saeko-san! She was really reliable!

"But it'll be very difficult. Are you aware that this will be a road lined with thorns?"

"I'll do it! As long as I can avoid the 'shuraba', I'll do anything!"

Saeko-san put her thumbs up as she head my response and then flipped her wrist upside down.

"Reverse-capture."

"...Huh? Re-tense?"

"Reverse, it's '逆', making a girl fall for you would be 'capture'. So if you flip that around, then you should fine. In other words…"

Saeko-san grabbed both of my shoulders and then shouted with an energetic expression:

"Make all of the girls except your girlfriend hate you!"

◆

After I watched Saeko-san get back in the car to drive off to work, the time was eight o'clock.

The sun was already high in the sky, but no one had gotten up yet. I guess everyone really had been affected by what happened yesterday.

I thought over the reverse-capture plan in the living room and already had my resolution. I'd start the operation at nine o'clock.

I went up the stairs and first knocked on Hime's door.

"Hime, it's me. Can I come in?"

No response.

Once again I knocked on the door:

"It seems like I've fully recovered my memories from my past life. Right now, I want to talk to the 'Holy Dragon Princess of Dawn'. Please open up."

At this moment, it sounded like she had held her breath on the other side of the door.

Tap, tap, tap, tap. Cute-sounding footsteps drew close and then the door was opened.

"Eita, is that true?"

Hime had blushed and was wearing thrilly pajamas that seemed like a ceremonial robe as she came to greet me.

"Can I come in, Hime?"

"Affirmative! Come in! Come in!"

Hime happily grasping my hand made me ache with a sense that I was about to commit some kind of sin. Uuuuhh, Hime had been getting really cute these days.

Hime sat on the bed, and in order to face her properly, I sat cross-legged on the ground.

Hime stared intently at me with large eyes:

"During last night's kiss, I was shocked."

"...Ah."

So it was that.

"I knew that President and Eita were lovers in this time line, and I knew that I was only a lover from a past life, therefore less than second in this world. But, it was very difficult to watch such a kiss right in front of me. Even though I said I was okay being second, I guess I'm being unreasonable. But, after taking that hit, there's nothing to do about it... But, but…"

Hime wiped the tears rising to her eyes, smiled, and said:

"If Eita has recovered his memories from his past life, then can I… hope?"

"That's..."

I'm really sorry, Hime.

I must destroy this newborn hope.

"Hey, Eita. What kind of memories did you get back? Are they memories that have to do with me? Or are they memories related to 'The Seven Kings of the Dragon Star'?"

"Aahh, well…"

I endured the weight on my conscience, and began to speak against my values.

"In truth… I'm actually not the 'Holy Dragon Knight of Dawn'."

"Huh?"

"In my past life, I was only an ordinary peasant. I was 'Villager A' with neither any dragonic powers nor aura. It seems like in order to deceive the Wyverns, the Holy Dragon Race installed fake memories in me, so I only *thought* I was the 'Holy Dragon Knight of Dawn'."

Hime leaned forward:

"How? How did you find out about this kind of thing?"

"I heard the voice of God last night just when I was removing the edges of the potato, in order to keep the potatoes from become mashed up!"

Masuzu once said during club activities, 'when describing life, one should emphasize the authentic everyday things'. I tried to follow that advice.

"God said the 'Holy Dragon Knight of Dawn' was reincarnated somewhere else on this planet, so my mission was over. He said I didn't have anything to do with this war anymore, so I could go live my life in freedom."

"…Surprising…"

Hime's eyes were opened wide as I spoke to her.

"God asked me to convey a message to the princess: 'Your real lover was reincarnated somewhere else on this planet. Find him, renew your bonds, and after stir-frying the entire thing soft using a low flame, you'll be ready to have a showdown with the Wyverns!'"

Hime maintained her stiff, surprised expression.

For Hime who believed I was 'her lover from a past life', this fact must have been a huge shock. The reason why Hime liked me, after all, was because we shared the same 'past life delusions'. If I defeated this point, then Hime would lose her reason to like me.

When I realized Hime might actually go look for the non-existent 'Holy Dragon Knight of Dawn', my bad conscience suddenly worked up——— But after I thought about it, it should be fine after all, because everyone wakes up from their delusions someday.

"I really am sorry for making you think I was your 'past lover'. Even though I am merely a villager, but from now on you can go look for your true destined one!"

Hime's shoulders were trembling slightly:

"…Er…Ful…"

"Eh? What do you mean, Hime?"

"——I think this setting is just *wonderful*!"

...Huh?

"Wait, did you just say this was a setting?"

"This sad and beautiful legend, it's really amazing..."

"Don't casually change the subject—!"

Hime came off the bed and held my hand.

"Eita, that's amazing! Amazing! Amazing! Villager A is amazing!"

"Huh? …Huh? What? What? But I'm a villager? A regular person?"

Hime excitedly shook her head and said:

"This is actually better. I've also always thought the prince was just a clown, so this is really cool!"

"I-In what way?"

So a clown? Okay, Well, clown works just fine.

Hime raised her nose.

"Because this way, I can hug you!"

"Able to hug? It shouldn't be like that, right?"

"In the past, I've only been able to be held. Because the 'Holy Dragon Knight of Dawn' is rather strong, I've only been protected. But if you're Villager A, then I'll be able to protect you, and I'll be the one to hug you, Eita!"

So rather than being an existence to be protected, she's changed into an existence that could protect others.

Instead of being in the position to receive love, she's changed to a position to give love.

I see now———— This story's pretty good— It's kingly—

"Wait, gimme a second! Don't you like the 'Holy Dragon Knight of Dawn'? He's your boyfriend from your past life, right?!"

"It's true, but my heart is rather hesitant right now. Should I stick to the bonds from my past life, or should I make new bonds in this time? Aaah..."

Hime faced the sky as she spoke with a very happy expression.

She was intoxicated.

She was fully reveling in her delusions.

...It couldn't be that the hit she suffered from that kiss yesterday had completely disappeared?

"How did it come to this?"

As I heard Hime's overjoyed cheers, I weakly collapsed flat to the ground.

The first girl, epic fail.

◆

I watched as Hime walked out the door to look for the 'Holy Dragon Knight of Dawn', and then tried to revive my spirit.

The next one was the 'fiancée', Fuyuumi Ai.

"Fuyuumi, it's me. Open up."

After a short period of time:

"...I don't want to see you!"

She whispered quietly through the door in response to me.

"Yeah, but I want to see you."

"[...]"

"Open the door, A-chan, please."

I heard a sigh from inside the room.

The doorknob slowly turned. Though the little crack that was open, I could see a glimpse of Fuyuumi's face. Her pink gown-like pajamas suited her very well.

"What? Don't just randomly use people's nicknames."

"I'm sorry."

Fuyuumi's face was depressed and almost unrecognizable, completely unlike her typically energetic self. Her eyelids were swollen… had she been crying?

I mustered my nearly discouraged willpower.

"Can I come in?"

"[...] [...] ...Not really."

I figured she meant 'yes', so I entered her room. With the curtains drawn entirely shut, the room appeared rather dark. The air conditioning was also very strong, so I felt a bit chilled.

"A-chan, can you take out the marriage registration form?"

"Huh? Why this all of a sudden…?"

"I want to see it, please."

A-chan stood there for a while, but in the end she slowly started moving. She took the pouch that was one the table.

"What do you want this for?"

Ai-chan pulled out the folded 'marriage registration form' and tilted her head, puzzled.

I silently took it, and immediately opened up the piece of paper which was covered in wrinkles. On it, A-chan's name and my own name written in hiragana, closely arranged together.

Right now, I'll rip this piece of paper.

If I do that, A-chan will despise me from the bottom of her heart. If a long-cherished and preserved object, brimming with memories, was to be treated like this, even a century of love will be disillusioned.

…A century of love.

In A-chan's case, it's a decade, right?

These ten years, she has remembered her promise with me. She's preserved this piece of paper this entire time.

I had utterly forgotten it, but A-chan continued to miss me in her heart.

—And today, I will end these ten years of love.

I used both of my hands to pinch the sides of the paper, and I raised it to eye level.

Come on, tear it.

Tear it. Now*!*

Use these fingers, and simply mercilessly tear it in half!

"[...] [...] ...!"

I-I can't do it!

I can't muster any strength.

Why? Do it now, Kidou Eita! Do you want to turn club activities into mayhem? Like this, all of the club members will become miserable. I might even get stabbed. If I can make her hate me right now, then I can prevent that kind of future!

"…D-Damn…!"

I clenched the sheet of paper and fell to my knees.

I can't do it. It's really impossible...

Rather suddenly, the teddy bear on the bed caught my eyes. Was this something that belonged to the hotel? If that was the case, it was rather weird. It was frayed everywhere, and its coat looked rather dirty.

"That's Murata."

Ai-chan muttered with her head lowered as she sat on the bed.

"Bear Murata was the stuffed animal I always held onto in Star Class in Kindergarten. Because I don't sleep well anywhere that's not home, I brought him."

"So your fictional boyfriend's name was derived from your stuffed animal's name."

Murata Michel Daigoro. I never thought this would be a mixture of her father's and a stuffed animal's names.

"Why don't you remember?"

"Eh?"

A-chan's eyes were reddening.

"I introduced him to you when we were in Star Class, right? I said he was my best friend. Didn't I introduce him already? I said I wanted to take care of him well. Why? Why don't you remember... Ta-kun, you idiot... ggg..."

That sniffling sounded like a crying child.

"I'm sorry. I'm really sorry, A-chan."

I bit the thumb of my right hand in order to hold back my irritability. Though, one bite or two weren't enough. Until A-chan stopped crying, I couldn't forgive myself.

After about five minutes, she finally stopped crying.

I used a handkerchief to wipe A-chan's face and then returned the 'marriage registration book' to her.

A-chan sniffled as she said:

"Is that all?"

"Yeah, thank you, A-chan."

No, I can't tear this sheet of paper. I better think of some other way to make A-chan hate me.

"Then, I'll be on my way."

"[...]"

"I'll go make breakfast. You can come eat later."

I stood up and was just about to walk out the door.

A-chan suddenly gave a great cry: 'Aaahh?'

"Sta…"

"Sta?"

"THE STAMP!"

She spread out the paper and showed it to me.

Right below where the name, 'Kidou Eita', was written with earthworm-like handwriting, there was a clear red thumb print.

"What's this? When I looked earlier, it wasn't there."

I suddenly thought of something and looked at my own hands.

From the place I had just bitten my thumb, there is a thin trail of oozing blood.

Red blood.

Red blood that stained my fingers.

My fingers stained with red blood had touched the paper.

When it touched the paper, it stained it.

Not possible, impossible.

Impossible, impossible, impossible, impossible, IMPOSSIBLE!

"Yaaaaaaaaaayyyyyyyy! This is—— TOO - AWESOME ♪ Ai-chan EPIC WIN ——————♪"

With her gloomy expression from earlier entirely swept away, A-chan held up her fist and shouted for victory.

"Haan♪ Han, han, han ♪ I-I-I got p-proposed at the sea! Ai-chan was proposed by Ta-kun♪"

I held onto A-chan's feet, who was elastically jumping for joy everywhere.

"Wait a minute! That's wrong! It's not a thumb print! It's just blood! It's my blood!"

"Hey! It's a blood stamp!"

"Are you a Yakuza?!"

My retort flew in and right out of her ears, and A-chan hugged the 'marriage registration book' to her chest, her entire body seemed to float.

"Thank you, Ta-kun! Really, really, thank you so much! So it's me after all...♪"

"That's not— That's not— A-chan…"

"I really was stupid to worry about Natsukawa Masuzu! A mere kiss, now that I think of it, that isn't legally binding! A marriage registration form is the strongest♪"

Even though she said this with a subtle and slightly stupid smile, it sparked an even higher level of terror.

"Come on———— A-chan— Listen to me—"

"Hey, Ta-kun. After we graduate from high school, let's go to the city hall, okay? Let's rent an apartment together and go to college, and then we can work together as milk deliverymen, participate in the same circles, cook together, and share the same… bed… Kya— Kyaaa—♪"

This isn't good.

In many senses, this is definitely not good.

Nobody can stop this *Fuyumi Ai!*

"Well, Ai-chan is going to go out for a run♪"

I watched my fiancée's figure as she wheeled her arms and charged outside, completely in a daze.

Yan enough♪ The second girl was also an epic failure!

◆

Chiwa was the last one left.

The time I gave CPR to Masuzu at swimming class, Chiwa was very upset, so I figured she would be quite angry about this.

'Put a copy of Shounen Jump under your shirt...'

Saeko-san's advice flashed through my mind, but I shook my head to let the anxiety dissolve.

Chiwa treated me like a little brother, it made me rather upset that she considered me to be someone younger than her. Though, I had never doubted Chiwa's affection for me before.

For that reason, it wasn't possible to use the 'reverse-capture'. I had to use a real attack as my method.

I had to tell Chiwa what she actually meant to me.

Even if I happened to have a 'girlfriend', she would never stop being my childhood friend.

There was no substitute for 'family', so this was something I should tell her.

"Chiwa, it's me."

I tried knocking on the door, but there was no response.

"Chiwa? Are you still asleep?"

I knocked on the door again and called, but this time a sound came from the living room on the first floor.

"I'm here, Ei-kun."

"What? You're downstairs already?"

I shouted as I went downstairs to the kitchen. Great, it seemed like her voice was still quite cheerful. Maybe she wasn't that depressed.

As I entered the living room, I found Chiwa casually dressed and standing by the window, watching the sea.

The white curtains and brand-name ribbons swayed together with the wind.

Her large, round eyes looked a little moist while they overlooked the sea. From the side, she looked more mature than usual.

What is it?

How should I put it? Today she was very… um...

...Cute.

"H-Hey, Chiwa. About last night."

"Mh."

"Masuzu and I, um… That's our relationship."

"I know."

Chiwa continued to watch the sea.

"After all, you're boyfriend and girlfriend. A kiss is normal."

"But in front of so many people, maybe it went a little bit too far?"

"Well, it was a performance to demonstrate love. Shouldn't it be expected?"

That sounded quite reasonable.

It was like she was already saying everything I intended to say.

"Chiwa, you're not angry?"

"Why would I be angry?"

Chiwa looked at my face for the first time this day.

She then exposed a weaker smile than usual:

"Even if I'm angry at Ei-kun, there's nothing I can do about it."

"That's true."

"Eita's been working so hard and desperately studied to make his dream of becoming a doctor come true. Compared to you, I haven't done anything. I don't have any right to be angry."

I didn't know how to response.

You need a right to be angry? That's not very Chiwa like.

"But last night I cried a little bit."

"[...]"

"I felt like Eita went to a place very far away, so I felt really sad. I felt like you were going with your girlfriend to a place where I couldn't follow. It scared me."

"…That won't happen…"

That's not possible, Chiwa.

Before I cure your body, I won't be going anywhere.

"You see, I'm pretty short, right? I'm actually really worried about this. I often wonder, will I ever grow up to be as tall as Natsukawa? Will my boobs and butt ever change considerably? When I take baths, I always think about this. Please grow. Grow. Grow. Grow big enough so that Ei-kun will look at me. Please… grow… okay…?"

Chiwa's voice became hoarse due to her tears.

"Enough, Chiwa."

I approached Chiwa, and intended to hug her shoulders.

But then.

Chiwa suddenly went tiptoe and leaned towards my face.

She went a little further than I thought she would on her toes, so, so then—

—It touched.

Chiwa's kiss was entirely different from Masuzu's.

Her little lips almost seemed like they'd be sucked into my mouth.

The 'nnn, nnn' subtle sounds of her breathing.

Because she was precariously standing on the tips of her toes, her breath was making these kinds of sounds.

"[...] [...] [...]"

After her lips parted, I couldn't say a word.

My shoulders undulated up and down as I panted, and I could only stare at Chiwa.

"You thought I couldn't reach, right?"

A reservoir of teardrops emerged at Chiwa's eyes as she smiled and said:

"Recently, I've grown taller. Didn't you notice?"

Tears were slowly starting to drip.

"—Because I've always been next to you, you didn't notice it, right?"

Now, the tears were really pouring down her face.

"You didn't notice, right? I even said it so many times. Hey, this time, will you listen carefully?"

Chiwa did not wipe away the tears on her cheeks and instead continued:

—Ei-kun, I love you.

At the same time, the sound of the door opening seemed to overlap.

"If 'I love you' could solve everything, there wouldn't be a need for the police, right?"

The speaker of these cold words had silver hair which fluttered in the wind.

Natsukawa Masuzu smiled.

"This seems like quite a happy moment. Miss Childhood Friend, may I join in?"

Chiwa wiped away her tears and smiled slightly.

"Can't you read the atmosphere? Girlfriend, why don't you come back in nine years?"

As I stood between these two, at that moment, I realized the 'third route' was already cut off.

What was bound to come, already did.

————I was stuck in the mayhem between my girlfriend and childhood friend.

Afterword

4巻発売おめでとうございます!
たかやKi

In many locations, the characters moved for the sake of *"Love"*. *"For who's sake"*, *"For what sake"*, they brandished love, got themselves tired; giving their all, dying and living for it.

On the other side, Natsukawa Masuzu moved for *"the sake of Running Away from Love"*. At the very least, she believed that. However, she couldn't escape it by herself, and as such, got Kidou Eita, a man with the same value system as her, involved, and continued running away from love. It was not an *"Escape of Love"*[34], but an *"Escape from Love"*. Where can these two run to? And what will they go through when love catches up to them? I'll be happy if you can continue following it to the end.

In this volume, I was able to have Takaya-Ki-sensei to be the guest illustrator. I feel that it's my lifetime pride to have been able to entrust it to my favorite mangaka, the illustrator of my debut work, "Odoru Hoshi Furu Reneshikuru (踊る星降るレネシクル)". With this, I'm able to add one more thing to my list of things that I can be proud of. I'm thankful.

And that's all for now. Thank you for staying with me.

(TLN: The thumbnail image is by the aforementioned Takaya-Ki-sensei, which congratulates Yuuji Yuuji for the launching of volume 4 of OreShura.)

Translator notes and references

1. ↑ In English.
2. ↑ **Reppuzan**: Lit.: "Gale-wind Slash". A meme which has been around for long and is being referenced in this scene. There are even some MADs about it using this very scene.
3. ↑ **Pom Juice**: Can be seen here.
4. ↑ **Maiden Voyage**: Reference to a work of art.
5. ↑ See here.
6. ↑ **Kyun**: A momentary tightening of one's chest caused by powerful feelings.
7. ↑ **Onigiri**: Can be seen here.
8. ↑ **Occupational Disease**: See here.
9. ↑ **Official Seals**: Equal a signature.
10. ↑ She's translating the English "fake" into its Japanese equivalents.
11. ↑ **Oba-sama**: Respectful for "aunt".
12. ↑ **Gal-Game**: See here.
13. ↑ **Otome-Game**: See here.
14. ↑ OreDere is very similar to the abbreviations "OreShura" and "OreImo". In each case, "Ore" means "I/me/my". The original name is "Ore no kanojo ga deredere sugiru".
15. ↑ **Nori-Tsukkomi**: Sometimes plays along with the 'boke', but right after jumping back to 'tsukommi' him.
16. ↑ **Chizuken Stew**: See here.
17. ↑ Something like this.
18. ↑ The first time she typed "sea" in japanese (Umi) and the second one on Engrish, following texts posses similar typos
19. ↑ The reason of why she didn't understood what "contraceptive" was, was because in the discussion it was never used on kanji [避妊具], the kanji used for writing it is very telling of what it does, ergo it wouldn't produce a misunderstanding
20. ↑ Green cars are used by Japanese National Railways and Japan Railways Group as first-class cars.
21. ↑ **Road Roller**: One of the most distinguishable attacks. It involves a character stopping time, grabbing a nearby road roller and slamming it into his victim while screaming, 'ROAD ROLLER DA!', to later pound it away until it explodes.
22. ↑ **Harvest**: Harvest is a stand which takes the form of a hundreds of small insects

which follow the commands of the user.

23. ↑ **Koala Biscuit**: See here.
24. ↑ Sfx for coming into contact with somthing soft.
25. ↑ **Five Card Stud**: See here.
26. ↑ **Sevens**: See here.
27. ↑ **Two Pairs**: A memory game where you have to pair up cards from a shuffled lot.
28. ↑ **Dogeza**: See here.
29. ↑ She has been calling him "anta", instead of "Kidou-san" or something similar.
30. ↑ Dere = cuteness.
31. ↑ In English.
32. ↑ Can also be read as if he tried to get her into her pants and was rejected.
33. ↑ **Teru Teru Bozu**: See here.
34. ↑ **Escape of Love:** In other words, elopement. I kept the literal words for contrast.

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